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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Centre gets 1 week to act on K'taka drought

A bench of Justices asked Centre to release financial assistance from NDRF

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

The Centre on Monday told the Supreme Court that the Election Commission (EC) has given clearance to it to deal with the issue raised by Karnataka regarding financial assistance for drought management.

A bench of Justices BR Gavai and Sandeep Mehta was hearing a plea filed by the Karnataka government seeking a direction to the Centre to release financial assistance from the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) to the state for drought management.

"The Election Commission has cleared the government to deal with this question. I think it will be done expeditiously," Attorney General R Venkataramani, appearing for the Centre, told the bench.

While hearing the plea on 8 April, the apex court had observed let there not be a "contest" between the Union and the State.

The Attorney General and Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, who were appearing for the Centre, had told the

Supreme Court of India
PHOTO: X/SUPREME COURT

bench they would seek instructions in the matter.

The petition has also sought to declare that the Centre's action in not releasing the financial assistance for drought arrangement as per the NDRF is "ex-facie violative" of the fundamental rights of the people of the State guaranteed under Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution.

It said the State is reeling under "severe drought", affecting the lives of its people and for the Kharif 2023 season, which starts in June and ends in September, a total of 223 out of 236 taluks are declared as drought-affected. The plea said 196 taluks are categorised as severely affected and the remaining 27 as moderately affected. *—PTI*

Victory of farmers, state govt: Cong

Congress on Monday claimed victory of the farmers of Karnataka and the State government after the Centre told the Supreme Court that the Election Commission has given clearance to it to deal with the issue raised by Karnataka regarding financial assistance for drought management. "After the people of Karnataka rejected him decisively and resoundingly in May 2023, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has consistently discriminated against Kannadigas and the State of Karnataka," Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said. *—PTI*

GUKESH MAKES HISTORY

Gukesh Dommaraju, 17, won the 2024 FIDE Candidates Tournament to become the youngest player in history to win a Candidates Tournament. He will play GM Ding Liren for the world championship title later this year ***PHOTO: PTI***

Koppal girl who went missing found dead

KOPPAL, 22 APRIL

The body of a 7-year-old girl who went missing on 19 April was found in Kinnala village of Koppal taluk on Sunday. The deceased was identified as Anushree Madiwala, who was found in a plastic bag within an abandoned structure. The family had registered a case at Koppal Women's Station following her disappearance. The villagers detected a foul smell emanating from a bag in a nearby wasteland. Forensic experts from Bellary were summoned to the location to conduct a detailed examination late into the night. *—Salar News*

ECI orders repoll in 8 polling stations in Arunachal

ITANAGAR, 22 APRIL

Election Commission of India (ECI) has ordered repolling in eight polling stations in Arunachal Pradesh where EVM damage and violence were reported during polling to simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly polls on 19 April, an official said. The Commission in an order on Sunday declared the polling in the eight polling stations as void and ordered fresh polling on 24 April from 6 am to 2 pm, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer Liken Koyu said in a communique. The polling stations where repoll would be held include, Sario in Bameng Assembly constituency in East Kameng, Longte Loth under Nyapin assembly seat in Kurung Kumey, Dingser, Bogiya Siyum, Jimbari and Lengi polling booths under Nacho constituency in Upper Subansiri district. *—PTI*

Bengaluru set for extended dry spell as temp soar

BENGALURU, 22 APRIL

As Bengaluru reaches the final week of April, a dry weather pattern is set to dominate, offering little respite from the scorching heat. The Indian Meteorological Department's latest projections suggest a further rise in temperatures by two to three degrees Celsius next week. With no rainfall predicted, temperatures are poised to range between 36-38°C throughout the week. Unlike the previous week's brief relief with scattered showers, this week's forecast indicates prolonged dry conditions, urging residents to prioritise hydration and heat avoidance measures. Despite a recent dip in temperatures following a peak of 37.6 degree Celcius on 6 April, marking the highest in eight years, Bengaluru continues to experience the throes of an unyielding heatwave. *—Salar News*

Opposition hits out at Modi's 'Muslim infiltrators' remark

Rahul Gandhi, Asaduddin Owaisi, Sitaram Yechury hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his remark on Monday ***PHOTO: PTI***

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

Opposition leaders on Monday slammed Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his comments made at an elections rally in Rajasthan, with some leaders also appealing to people to reach out to the Election Commission of India (ECI).

In a post on X, Communist Party of India (Marxist) General Secretary Sitaram Yechury said while Modi's remarks are atrocious, the silence of ECI is worse.

"This is atrocious! The silence of the Election Commission is more atrocious!! Modi's inflammatory speech is a gross violation of the Model Code of Conduct and Supreme Court pronouncements on Hate Speech," Yechury said.

"Merits strictest action and contempt of Court," he said.

He hoped Supreme Court will take note of the incident and initiate action.

Party sources said that a petition signed by "concerned citizens," will be sent to the Election Commission later in the day. Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Saket Gokhale also appealed to the people to write to the Election Commission over Modi's remarks. In a post on X, the TMC Rajya Sabha MP shared the email id of the Chief Election Commissioner, and urged people to write to him, stating that the poll panel does not listen to Opposition.

"Election Commission ignores the Opposition and has kept giving a free pass to Modi and the BJP. During elections, the EC is not accountable to political parties. But - they're accountable to the people of India," Gokhale said.

He urged at least a thousand "responsible Indian citizens" to send a short email to the CEC demanding strict action against Modi for his remarks.

While addressing a rally in Rajasthan's Banswara, Modi on Sunday suggested that if the Congress comes to power, it would redistribute wealth to Muslims. Modi alleged that Congress plans to give people's hard-earned money and valuables to "infiltrators" and "those who have more children." *—PTI*

- Communist Party of India (Marxist) General Secretary Sitaram Yechury said while Modi's remarks are atrocious, the silence of ECI is worse

Earlier, when their (Congress) government was in power, they had said that Muslims have the first right on the country's assets. This means to whom will this property be distributed? It will be distributed among those who have more children. It will be distributed to the infiltrators. Should your hard-earned money go to the infiltrators? Do you approve of this?

-Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

What does the Model Code of Conduct say?

No party or candidate shall be included in any activity which may aggravate existing differences or create mutual hatred or cause tension between different castes and communities, religious or linguistic. There shall be no appeal to caste or communal feelings for securing votes. Criticism of other parties or their workers based on unverified allegations or distortion shall be avoided. *—PTI*

Now, BJP expels Eshwarappa from party for 6 years

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has expelled KS Eshwarappa from the party after the leader decided to contest Lok Sabha elections as an independent candidate from Shivamogga.

BJP stated Eshwarappa has "embarrassed" the party by going to the polls as an independent candidate. Shivamogga will go to the polls on 7 May in phase 3.

Former deputy chief minister and senior BJP leader Eshwarappa submitted his nomination papers as an independent candidate from Shivamogga on 12 April.

Three Independent candidates, who had filed nomination papers for the Shivamogga Lok Sabha seat, withdrew their papers on Monday. With that, 23 people including former BJP minister Eshwarappa have remained in the fray.

Monday was the last day to withdraw the papers.

The candidates who are in the fray are BY Raghavendra of BJP, Geetha Shivarajkumar

KS Eshwarappa ***PHOTO: PTI***

- Former deputy chief minister and senior BJP leader Eshwarappa submitted his nomination papers as an independent candidate from Shivamogga on 12 April

of Congress, SK Prabhu of Karnataka Rashtra Samiti, Aruna Kanahalli of Uttama Prajakeeya Party, Mohammed Yusuf Khan of Young Star Empowerment Party, AD Shivappa of Bahujan Samaj Party.

Independent candidates are KS Eshwarappa, G Jayadeva, EH Nayak, Chandrashekhar HC, among others. *—ANI*

Dharwad: Lingayat seer withdraws nomination

DHARWAD, 22 APRIL

Lingayat seer Fakira Dingaleshwar Swami of Shirahatti Fakkireshwar Mutt, t, who has launched a tirade against Union Minister Pralhad Joshi, withdrew his nomination from Dharwad parliamentary constituency on Monday.

The Lingayat leader submitted his nomination papers as an independent candidate on 18 April. His political agent Sachin Patil withdrew the seer's nomination on his behalf. Patil said: "I withdrew his nomination today (on Monday) as per Swamiji's order.."

Dingaleshwar's decision to step back from the electoral fray comes at a critical juncture, as the race for the Dharwad parliamentary seat heats up with the formidable presence of Union Minister and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate, Pralhad Joshi. The Lingayat seer's initial entry into the contest had injected a new dynamic into the electoral dynamics of the region, with many anticipating a fierce battle. *—ANI*

HIGHEST HONOUR

Naidu, Bopanna, Mithun, Usha conferred Padma awards

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

Former vice president M Venkaiah Naidu, founder of Sulabh International Bindeshwar Pathak and a host of other prominent persons were conferred with Padma Awards by President Droupadi Murmu at a ceremonial function held at the Rashtrapati Bhavan here on Monday.

Rohan Bopanna has now been conferred with the honour of Padma Shri. Naidu, Pathak, who was given the award posthumously, and renowned Bharatanatyam dancer Padma Subrahmanyam were conferred with the Padma Vibhushan. Actor Mithun Chakraborty, singer Usha Uthup, former Uttar Pradesh governor Ram Naik and industrialist Sitaram Jindal were

President Droupadi Murmu confers Padma Shri on tennis player Rohan Bopanna in the field of Sports ***PHOTO: PTI***

conferred with the Padma Bhushan. Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, among others, were present at the function. The awards are given in various disciplines or fields of activities, viz.- art, social work, public affairs, literature and education, sports, civil service, etc. Padma Vibhushan is awarded for exceptional and distinguished service, the Padma Bhushan for distinguished service of order and the Padma Shri for distinguished service in any field. *—PTI*

24,000 jobless as HC cancels WB recruitments

KOLKATA, 22 APRIL

The Calcutta High Court on Monday ordered cancellation of all appointments made through the recruitment process of State Level Selection Test-2016 (SLST) in West Bengal government-sponsored and aided schools, declaring it as "null and void".

The court directed that a section of those recruits will have to return salaries drawn by them along with 12 per cent per annum interest. Over 23 lakh candidates had appeared for the SLST-2016 for 24,640 vacant posts. The court directed that the persons who had been appointed outside the panel after its expiry and also those who submitted blank OMR sheets but obtained appointments, must return all remunerations and benefits received by them to the state exchequer along with 12 per cent per annum interest from the date of receipt till deposit, within a period of four weeks from date.

A division bench comprising justices Debangsu Basak and Md Shabbar Rashidi also directed the CBI to undertake further investigation in respect. The bench also asked the West Bengal School Service Commission (SSC) to initiate a fresh appointment process.

A total of 25,753 appointment letters were issued against 24,640 vacancies, said Firdaus Shamim, a lawyer for some of the petitioners who alleged irregularities in the selection process.

The bench, formed by the Chief Justice of the high court on a direction of the Supreme Court, had heard 350 petitions and appeals relating to the selection of candidates for appointment by the SSC in the categories of teachers of classes 9, 10, 11 and 12 and group-C and D staffers through the SLST-2016. *—PTI*

MANIPUR: 81.6% VOTER TURNOUT IN REPOLLING

IMPHAL, 22 APRIL

A voter turnout of 81.6 per cent was recorded till 3 pm in repolling at 11 polling stations in the Inner Manipur Lok Sabha constituency on Monday. Meanwhile, re-polling in 11 polling stations of the I-Inner Manipur Parliamentary constituency is being held.

The affected polling stations where repolling is being conducted are Moirangkampu Sajeb Upper Primary School and S Ibobi Primary School (East Wing), in the Khurai assembly constituency, four in Kshetrigao, one in Thongju, three in Uripok, and one in Konthoujam, incidents of violence were reported at some of the polling booths in conflict-torn Manipur where some miscreants opened fire and even destroyed EVMs. *—ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

City hotel receives bomb threat

BENGALURU, 22 APRIL

Bengaluru was once again rattled by a bomb threat, this time targeting the Kadamba Gardenia Hotel in Jalahalli. After the letter was received on Monday, a team of Bengaluru police along with a bomb squad reached the scene to ensure the safety of patrons and staff. According to reports, the email hinted at the presence of explosives within the hotel premises, leading to the immediate evacuation of 100-odd guests and employees. Among those affected was a baby shower event, abruptly halted as authorities conducted searches as a precautionary measure. No explosive substance was discovered and authorities formed special teams to analyse the threat and review surveillance footage. This incident echoes previous threats in the city, underscoring the recurring challenge of dealing with anonymous warnings. ***—Salar News***

Actor couple shares horror of mob attack

BENGALURU, 22 APRIL

Kannada actor Harshika Poonacha and her husband Bhuvan Ponnanna were attacked by a group of individuals at a restaurant's parking lot in Bengaluru. The assault, which occurred on 2 April, has sparked outrage and raised concerns about safety in City. The altercation reportedly began when Ponnanna asked a stranger to move aside in Kannada, to which the individual responded with derogatory remarks about Kannada speakers. The situation escalated when a group of 20-30 people, speaking in Hindi, Urdu, and broken Kannada, joined in.

Poonacha, who recorded the incident, attempted to seek help.***—Salar News***

Leopard Task Force deployed in Chamundi Hills

MYSURU, 22 APRIL

Forest Department has deployed Leopard Task Force for the first time in Chamundi Hills here to prevent forest fire and also implemented a set of measures to ensure the safety of the hills and its visitors. To combat potential fire hazards, the department has demarcated around 68km across Chamundi Hills and other vulnerable areas prone to fire incidents. This includes locations that have previously experienced fire outbreaks. A team of six personnel from Leopard Task Force will conduct regular patrols on the hills to monitor and deter any unauthorised activities that could lead to fires. Tourists are advised against using flammable materials in the forest area and are urged not to litter. In the event of a fire, this specialized team is equipped with a response vehicle and firefighting equipment for extinguish flames. ***—Salar News***

Govt forms panel to probe CET exam claims

BENGALURU, 22 APRIL

State government has formed an expert committee to investigate the allegations that some of the questions that appeared in Common Entrance Test (CET) were outside the syllabus on Monday. The examination, held on 18 and 19 April, included subjects like Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics and Biology, with questions reportedly beyond the prescribed syllabus. In response to the widespread opposition, Higher Education Department has ordered an investigation, with objections regarding the examination accepted until 27 April. Karnataka Examination Authority has invited objections, promising a review by subject experts before a final decision is made.***-Salar News***

Hubballi murder will be handed over to CID: CM

The accused Fayaz Khondunaik, who fled from the scene, was arrested by police

SHIVAMOGGA, 22 APRIL

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday said his government has decided to hand over Hubballi student murder case to Crime Investigation Department and that a special court will be set up for its speedy disposal.

Neha Hiremath, 23, daughter of Congress councillor of Hubballi-Dharwad Municipal Corporation Niranjan Hiremath, was allegedly stabbed to death on the campus of BVB College on Thursday. The accused Fayaz Khondunaik, who fled from the scene, was arrested by police. Neha was a first-year Master of Computer Application student and Fayaz was earlier her classmate.

> **Charge sheet has to be filed in a time-bound manner and the case has to be disposed of, so the special court will be constituted**
>
> -CM Siddaramaiah

"Charge sheet has to be filed in a time-bound manner and the case has to be disposed of, so the special court will be constituted," Siddaramaiah said.

The Chief Minister said, "I have not been able to go to her (parent's) residence. Our district in-charge minister and party workers had gone. Also, HK Patil (Law Minister) is going. I will go when I go there (Hubballi)."

CM Siddaramaiah PHOTO: PTI

The murder case, which sparked widespread outrage, has snowballed into a political slugfest between the ruling Congress and opposition BJP. While the ruling party has tried to project it as an incident with a personal angle, the saffron party has called it a "love jihad" case and said it's a testimony of the deterioration of law and order in the state.

Crime cases have come down during Congress rule, the Chief Minister claimed. "In 2023 (Congress rule) it was 1,295 (crime cases). From 2019-2022, during four years of BJP, it was 1,300, 1,318, 1,342 and 1,370 respectively."

"We will give protection to everyone during our tenure. I condemn Neha's murder. Neha's father has spoken about the involvement of four more suspects, I have asked for it also to be investigated," he added.

'Fayaz stabbed Neha 14 times in 30 seconds'

The postmortem report of Hubballi murder victim Neha has revealed that she was stabbed 14 times in just 30 seconds, police sources said on Monday. The accused, Fayaz Khondunaik, had stabbed her chest and neck, the report said.

"Neha was stabbed in the neck many times and as a result, her blood veins were cut resulting in severe bleeding, following which Neha succumbed," police sources, quoting the post-mortem report, told IANS.

—PTI, IANS

EVEN CONG MAN DOESN'T TRUST STATE GOVT: BJP

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

Hubballi murder victim Neha Hiremath's father, who is a Congress corporator, doesn't trust Karnataka government, BJP National Spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said.

"The deceased's father was a Congress corporator. And today, her father himself is saying I don't have trust in the Karnataka government that does appeasement politics," Bhatia said.

Bhatia compared the killing of Neha Hiremath to that of a jungle raj and said, "The Hubballi incident was a heart-wrenching incident. The entire country came together and said this victim's family should be given justice."

On Sunday, BJP MP and candidate from Kalaburagi Lok Sabha seat Umesh G Jadhav condemned the murder and criticised Congress for politicising the matter.

BJP leader and national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla accused Congress of focusing more on protecting their vote bank rather than addressing women's safety.

"Why does Congress prioritise vote bank protection over women's safety? This isn't the first time. When there was a blast at Rameshwaram Cafe, Congress was more concerned about vote banks, not public safety. When people were beaten for saying "Ram Ram" during Ram Navami, Congress stood with the vote bank. When "Pakistan Zindabad" slogans were raised, Congress stood with the vote bank. But from Bengal to Bengaluru, Congress leaders don't stand with women or with Neha," Poonawalla said.

Poonawalla raised questions about Karnataka's law and order situation under Congress's governance. "It is very unfortunate that in Karnataka, the law and order situation has become such that even the daughter of a Congress leader is not safe. How can anyone else's daughter be safe then?". *—ANI*

Govt will deal with it in its own way: DKS

BENGALURU, 22 APRIL

DK Shivakumar PHOTO: PTI

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Monday said his government has no objection to Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probing Hubballi murder case, however, his government will deal with the case in its own way.

The remarks came after BJP demanded a CBI probe into the murder of the daughter of a Congress Councillor, who was stabbed to death on the campus of BVB College last week. BJP has alleged that police are trying to "divert" the case.

Niranjan Hiremath, the father of the girl, has demanded a CBI investigation into the incident. He also demanded that the police commissioner in charge of the case should be transferred for alleged "negligence". "I have given the names of 8 people openly. They have not even caught one person. I am losing faith now. They are trying to divert my case. Give it to CBI if you cannot do it. The commissioner in this case is a lady, even then she is not taking a girl's murder seriously. She is working under some pressure. I demand the commissioner should be transferred for negligence in the case. I demand that the case should be given to CBI," Hiremath said on Sunday. Assuring that strict action will be taken in the murder case, IT & BT Minister Priyank Kharge said on Monday that the State government has taken the necessary steps as per the law, and the investigation has started.

Kharge said BJP is dividing society on the matter. "We have made all the necessary arrests. We have started the process of investigation and no doubt we will take the most stringent action," he said. Kharge also accused the BJP of politicising the incident during election times. "If this gruesome incident had happened elsewhere in any part of the BJP-rule States, would the rules have changed? No. We are completely with the family of Neha. We understand the pain that their family is going through and we are doing all within our capacity to ensure that justice will be delivered as soon as possible," he added.

—PTI

The Karnataka unit of BJP on Monday staged statewide protests against the murder of a 23-year-old Neha Hiremath PHOTO: SALAR

BJP holds State-wide protests

BENGALURU, 22 APRIL

The Karnataka unit of BJP on Monday staged statewide protests against the murder of a 23-year-old Neha Hiremath at a college in Hubballi, saying Congress government's alleged "appeasement politics" was responsible for the incident.

The party also highlighted a series of incidents such as the bomb blast in Rameshwaram Cafe in Bengaluru, the attack on youths for chanting Jai Sri Ram, and reciting Hanuman Chalisa. BJP State President BY Vijayendra led the protests in Mysuru, while Leader of Opposition R Ashoka and former chief minister Basavaraj Bommai spearheaded the agitation in Tumakuru and Haveri. Former chief minister Jagadish Shettar led the protests in Belagavi where he is fighting the election on a BJP ticket. Ballari BJP candidate B Sriramulu took part in the agitation in Ballari City. Murugesh Nirani in Bagalkot and Basanagouda Patil Yatnal in Kalaburagi led the agitation in their cities respectively. In Hubballi and Dharwad, BJP MLAs Arvind Bellad and Mahesh Tenginkai conducted the protests.

Protesters took out a march, raised slogans 'Long Live Neha Hiremath' and staged sit-in demonstrations holding placards and Neha's photograph. They burnt tyres in the middle of the road to express their anger.

—PTI

Karnataka is like ATM for Congress, says Annamalai

BENGALURU, 22 APRIL

TN BJP state president Annamalai campaigned for Bengaluru South BJP candidate Tejasvi Surya in Bengaluru on Monday PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

BJP Tamil Nadu Chief K Annamalai held a roadshow along with the party's candidate from Bengaluru South seat Tejasvi Surya here on Monday.

Stating that in 10 years, not only the Narendra Modi government has implemented good schemes for Bengaluru, but Surya has also worked extensively for the constituency, Annamalai urged people to vote for him. "Before, only 14 central medical shops were present in this constituency but now 138 central medical shops have come; it's because of Tejasvi Surya," he said.

"Congress has become desperate because Karnataka is like an ATM for them. Even during the Assembly elections, we warned how Congress would use the State like an ATM. We are seeing it now; they are bleeding the State dry. A State that was a revenue surplus before Bommai left office has become a revenue deficit now. So, people are clear that they will not repeat the same mistake (of choosing Congress). For Lok Sabha, people will be with Modi and on 4 June, the BJP-led NDA will sweep all 28 seats in Karnataka," he said.

"Law and order have always been in bad condition during Congress because they do appeasement politics. What happened in Hubballi is not only distressing but extremely worrying. This is a shameless attitude. He (the father of the victim) is a Congress corporator," Annamalai added.

Neha Hiremath, daughter of Congress Corporator Niranjan Hiremath, was stabbed to death by her former friend Fayaz on the college campus in Hubli. The accused has been arrested.

Praising the Tamil Nadu BJP chief, Surya said, "He (Annamalai) has a big fan following in Bengaluru South as he worked as the DCP here and people know him well. Appeasement politics and vote bank politics have cost the nation. It is time that Congress learns its lesson or people will teach it a lesson.". *—ANI*

'PM'S 400 PAAR AIMED TO CHANGE CONSTITUTION'

CHANNAPTANA, 22 APRIL

Congress President M Mallikarjun Kharge on Monday alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for "400 paar" during the election campaign is aimed at getting NDA two-thirds majority in Lok Sabha that is required to change the Constitution.

Kharge also said that he was ready for an open debate to discuss Congress' manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections, as he hit out at Modi for his statement that it completely bears the imprint of the Muslim League.

"This election is important for saving democracy and the Constitution. If you vote on these issues, the vote will go to Congress. If you don't vote for Congress there will be no Constitution or democracy in the country," Kharge said. He said, "Modi is seeking two-thirds majority. He is saying '400 paar', because to change the Constitution, two thirds majority is required. To get that two-thirds majority Modi is saying '400 paar'."

Questioning as to why Modi is allegedly not stopping RSS and BJP leaders from speaking on changing the Constitution. *—PTI*

Quadruple murder: Son gave ₹65 L 'supari' to kin

GADAG, 22 APRIL

The Gadag police have cracked the mystery behind four murders that took place on 19 April, with the arrest of eight people, including kingpin Vinayak Bakale, who allegedly gave a contract Rs 65 lakh contract to assailants to eliminate his parents and brother Karthik Bakale.

The plot went awry and the parents survived. However, Karthik Bakale and the family's close relatives were hacked to death in the early hours of 19 April.

Karthik, 27; Parashuram Hadimani, 55; Lakshmi Hadimani, 45, and Akanksha Hadimani, 16, were found murdered at Dasara Oni in Gadag, police said. Karthik was the son of BJP leader Prakash Bakale and Sunanda Bakale, who is the vice-president of Gadag-Betageri City Municipal Council.

Police sources said Karthik's marriage had been fixed, which the Hadimanis had come to attend.

Since the jewellery, valuables and cash were intact in the house, police doubted that the motive was not robbery but something else, police sources said.

They said that a property dispute among the siblings was suspected to be the reason behind the murder as Prakash was to give all his properties to Karthik, which irked Vinayak, who allegedly decided to wipe out his parents and brother.

On Monday, Inspector General of Police (North Zone) Vikas Kumar told reporters that they had arrested Vinayak Prakash Bakale, 35; Fairoz Khazi, 29; Jishan Khazi, 24; all from Gadag; twin brothers Sahil Ashfaq Khazi, 19; Sohail Ashfaq Khazi, 19; Sultan Jilani Sheikh, 23; Mahesh Jagannath Salunke, 21, and Waheed Liyaqat Bepari, 21, all from Miraj in Sangli district of Maharashtra.

Vinayak had given a Rs 65 lakh contract to Fairoz, who arranged vehicles and weapons and carried out surveillance, Kumar said.

The assailants broke into the house thinking that only three people were present, the IGP said, adding that the targets were Vinayak's parents and brother. "Vinayak gave the contract to eliminate his parents and brother Karthik.

—PTI

AICC General Secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala and MLA NA Haris campaign for Congress Bengaluru Central candidate Mansoor Ali Khan at Shivajinagar in Bengaluru on Monday PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

THREAT OVER RELIGION

Couple held for forcing married woman to convert to Islam

BELAGAVI, 22 APRIL

A couple was arrested after a 28-year-old married woman accused them of allegedly forcing her to convert to Islam by threatening to circulate her private photographs, police said on Monday.

The victim also alleged that she was raped by the man, Rafik, in front of his wife on several occasions when she was staying with them at a rented house since 2021, police said.

According to the police, the woman also alleged in her complaint that this month, the couple forced her to wear a burqa instead of "kumkum" and also forced her to perform namaaz five times a day.

Rafik also threatened to circulate her intimate pictures to her family members and others if she did not divorce her husband, convert to Islam and live with them, she said in the complaint.

The victim got married in 2013 and has two children. In 2020, she met Rafik at her husband's grocery store which he visited frequently and later befriended her.

They also got involved in a physical relationship, which her husband got to know later.

This led to a quarrel and she left her husband's house, a senior police officer said.

After a gap of about two months, she returned to her husband's house on the condition that she would end her relationship with Rafik, but when she conveyed that to him, he started threatening her with her private pictures, he said.

—PTI

EX-SPEAKER RAMESH KUMAR CALLS PM 'SHANI'

BENGALURU, 22 APRIL

Senior Congress leader and former Assembly Speaker KR Ramesh Kumar has referred to Prime Minister Narendra Modi as "Shani" that has "afflicted" the country.

Responding to this, the BJP lashed out at the six-time MLA on Sunday night. "Whether roosters crow or not, the morning sun will certainly rise, and (KV) Gowtham too will certainly win. Congress will certainly win in Karnataka. Modi Saheb, believing in god, we are waiting for Lok Sabha poll results, to see this country getting rid of Shani" Kumar said on Sunday. *—PTI*

AP CM Jagan declares assets worth ₹529cr

AMARAVATI, 22 APRIL

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy's assets grew by 41 per cent during the last five years at Rs 529. 50 crore while he declared an income of Rs 57.75 crore for the year 2022-23. Jagan had, during the 2019 Assembly polls, declared Rs 375.20 crore worth of assets. Pulivendula local YSR Congress Party leaders filed the nomination with authorities on behalf of Jagan on Monday. According to the affidavit with the Election Commission, Jagan's wife Bharati Reddy has assets, both movable and immovable worth Rs 176.30 crore. The YSR Congress chief is contesting from Pulivendula Assembly constituency. —*PTI*

RaGa will create division, don't fall for it: Irani

AMETHI, 22 APRIL

WUnion minister and local MP Smriti Irani on Monday alleged that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi will come to Amethi after 26 April and divide the people in the name of casteism and visit one temple after the other. She said, "Rahul Gandhi and the Congress party rejected the invitation for the consecration ceremony of Lord Shri Ram in Ayodhya but he will be seen roaming around the temples in Amethi. So there is a need to be careful and alert." In a major upset for the Congress in 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Irani wrested Amethi from Rahul Gandhi, who had held the constituency for 15 years. Congress has not yet declared its candidate from the seat but local party workers are rooting for Rahul Gandhi to contest again. The Union minister also alleged that Rahul Gandhi never raised issues of Amethi in the Parliament and was often missing from the House. People in Amethi could get drinking water supplied to their house only after Narendra Modi came to power, she claimed.—*PTI*

Modi govt has eliminated terrorism: Shah

RAIPUR, 22 APRIL

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday said the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has eliminated terrorism from the country while Naxalism is on the verge of ending. Addressing an election rally in Chhattisgarh's Kanker town, Shah also asked Naxalites to surrender, or else they would be rooted out from the state in two years. He asked Congress leader Rahul Gandhi that four generations of his family were in power in the country, but what they have done for the poor people in Chhattisgarh. "Congress says the minority (community) has the first right over the country's resources of the country, but we (BJP) say the poor, adivasis, Dalits and backwards have the first right over resources of the country," Shah said. He also said Congress leaders did not attend the consecration ceremony of Lord Ram's idol at the Ayodhya temple. —*PTI*

Specially-abled to man Delhi poll booths

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

To encourage inclusivity, Delhi will have at least one polling booth in each of the seven parliamentary constituencies that will be manned by people with disabilities (PwD), officials said on Monday. Most of the polling stations in the national capital are disabled-friendly and necessary arrangements will be made so that the staffers are not inconvenienced, they added.
Delhi Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) P Krishnamurthy told PTI that his team has identified polling booths in each of the constituencies that will have the entire staff comprising differently-abled people. "Polling personnel from PwD community will be deployed at these booths based on their consent," he said. —*PTI*

BJP candidate wins Surat seat unopposed

Following win, Cong alleges 'match-fixing'

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

BJP candidate Mukesh Dalal was on Monday elected unopposed from Surat Lok Sabha constituency in Gujarat after all other nominees withdrew from the fray, a poll official said.

The development marks the first victory of BJP in the ongoing Lok Sabha elections.

"I declare that Mukeshkumar Chandrakant Dalal, sponsored by BJP, has been duly elected to fill the seat in the House from Surat parliamentary constituency," district collector cum election officer Saurabh Pardhi told media persons as he handed over the Certificate of Election to Dalal.

Voting for all 26 constituencies in Gujarat is scheduled for 7 May, but with the result of Surat seat already out, polling will be held on 25 seats.

Except for Dalal, all 8 candidates in the fray from Surat- 4 Independents, 3 from smaller parties and Pyarelal Bharti of Bahujan Samaj Party- withdrew their nomination papers on the last day, as per the Surat district election office.

Notably, the candidature of Congress' Nilesh Kumbhani from Surat seat was rejected on Sunday after the district returning officer prima facie found discrepancies in the signature of the proposers.

Gujarat BJP President CR Paatil (right) with Mukesh Dala
PHOTO: X/ CRPaatil

The nomination form of Suresh Padsala, Congress' substitute candidate from Surat, was also invalidated.

Congress however claimed that BJP was frightened by the anger of micro, small and medium enterprise (MSME) owners and the business community and attempted "match-fixing" even in the Surat Lok Sabha seat which the ruling party has been winning since 1984.

Voting for all 26 constituencies in Gujarat is scheduled for 7 May, but with the result of Surat seat already out, polling will be held on 25 seats.

Taking a swipe at BJP, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi said, "The dictator's 'asli surat' (true face) is once again bared in front of the country."

"Taking away the people's right to elect their leader is another step towards destroying the Constitution of Babasaheb Ambedkar. I am once again saying - this is not just an election to form a government, this is an election to save the country, this is an election to protect the Constitution," he on X. Reacting to the development in Surat, Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh claimed that democracy is under threat.

"'Aap chronology samajhiye' (Understand the chronology): Surat District Election Officer rejects the Congress' candidate for Surat Lok Sabha Nilesh Kumbhani's nomination for 'discrepancies in the verification of signatures of three proposers'. he said on X. —*PTI*

35 candidates have won unopposed

The BJP's Mukesh Dalal has become the first candidate in the last 12 years to have won a Lok Sabha election unopposed. Before Dalal's unopposed entry to the 18th Lok Sabha, there have been at least 34 others who have won the parliamentary polls since 1951 without an electoral battle.

Of the candidates who have entered the Lok Sabha without a contest, the maximum have been from the Congress. Sikkim and Srinagar constituencies have seen such unopposed elections twice. He is also perhaps the first candidate from the BJP to have ever won a parliamentary poll unopposed. His victory from the Surat parliamentary constituency comes close on the heels of 10 BJP candidates winning uncontested in the just-held assembly elections in Arunachal Pradesh.

—*PTI*

ROW OVER DIABETES

Court rejects Kejriwal's medical consultation

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

A Delhi Court on Monday rejected an application moved by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to consult his doctor through video conferencing daily for 15 minutes with respect to his acute diabetes and fluctuating blood sugar level. Kejriwal had also sought to allow his wife to join and remain present on VC.

Special Judge Kaveri Baweja of Rouse Avenue Courts said that the jail authorities shall ensure that all requisite medical treatment is provided to Kejriwal in Jail.

Though it shall continue to be the primary duty of Tihar Jail authorities, who are stated to be fully equipped to take care of the health of the applicant, to ensure that all requisite medical treatment is provided to him in jail, however, in the event of any requirement for specialized consultation, the jail Authorities shall consult the Medical Board to be constituted by Director, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), comprising of a senior endocrinologist, diabetologist, as per the request made on April 20, already sent by DG Prisons, said the Court.The said

Arvind Kejriwal ***PHOTO: PTI***

Medical Board is further requested to prescribe a diet and exercise plan, if required, for the applicant considering his medical requirements and relevant data regarding his vital statistics. The Medical Board may, as and when required, also physically examine the applicant in jail, said the court.

The applicant shall, however, continue to be provided with home-cooked food, subject to the condition that it shall strictly be in compliance with the diet as prescribed by the above-mentioned Medical Board. Till the time such Board prescribes a diet plan for the applicant, his family may provide home-cooked food to him, though it shall be strictly as per the diet chart of his private doctor order dated 1 April, added the court.—*ANI*

12 members of royal families up for Assembly, Lok Sabha polls in Odisha

JAIPUR, 21 APRIL

Twelve members of different royal families in Odisha are contesting the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections seeking votes of commoners. Elections to the 21 Lok Sabha constituencies in Odisha and 147 Assembly segments will be held simultaneously in the state from 13 May to 1 June.

BJD has fielded 28-year-old Sulakshana Geetanjali Devi, granddaughter of veteran leader late AN Singhdeo of Dharakote as its candidate for the Sanakhemundi Assembly constituency.

BJD has also fielded Chinmayananda Srirup Deb, son of Usha Devi, royal scion of Chikiti to contest from Chikiti Assembly segment. BJP's Sangeeta Kumari Singh Deo from the Bolangir Lok Sabha seat. Her husband senior BJP leader KV Singh Deo has also been fielded by BJP from the Patnagarh assembly segment. BJD has also fielded Bamanda 'Rani' Arundhati Devi, who is the wife of erstwhile Deogarh king and BJP's Sambalpur MP Nitesh Ganga Dev, as its Deogarh Assembly candidate. Pushpendra Singh Deo, has been fielded by BJD in the Dharmgarh Assembly seat.

BJD also fielded Sanjukta Singh to contest from the Angul segment.

Pratyusha Rajeswari in the Nayagarh assembly segment while Pratap Deb, a member of the Aul royal family, will fight for the Aul seat for BJD. Congress has fielded Susmita Singh Deo, a member of the Dhenkanal royal family for the Dhenkanal Assembly seat.

—*PTI*

SCHOOL JOBS CASE

Ex-HC judge asks Didi to resign

TAMLUK , 22 APRIL

Terming the Calcutta High Court order to cancel all appointments made through the recruitment process of the State Level Selection Test-2016 (SLST) in West Bengal government-sponsored and aided schools as an "appropriate judgment", former judge of the court Abhijit Gangopadhyay on Monday demanded "immediate resignation" of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

Gangopadhyay, whose single bench had previously ordered CBI probe into alleged irregularities in the recruitment process, asserted that "the entire group of fraudsters in the state administration" responsible for perpetrating the scam "should be hanged".

Abhijit Gangopadhyay ***PHOTO: PTI***

A division bench comprising justices Debangsu Basak and Md Shabbar Rashidi on Monday also directed the CBI to undertake further investigation in respect of the appointment process, and submit a report in three months.

Gangopadhyay said, "The real culprits are sitting in top positions of state administration and hiding behind their security bubble. If they have the courage and any shame left in them, they should quit their positions of power, shred their protective cover and face investigations." —*PTI*

PM speaking out of fear of defeat, says Telangana CM

HYDERABAD, 22 APRIL

Taking exception to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's comments that if the Congress comes to power, it would redistribute the wealth of the people to Muslims, Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Monday said that Modi is speaking out of fear of defeat.

Addressing an election rally in Nizamabad, Reddy said that whenever Congress has been in power, it gave what is due to Dalits, Adivasis and OBCs, and not by taking away the property of someone else.

Modi on Sunday suggested that if the Congress comes to power, it would redistribute the wealth of the people to Muslims. Modi alleged that the Congress plans to give people's hard-earned money and valuables to "infiltrators" and "those who have more children".

"If the Prime Minister, who took oath on the Constitution,

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy during an election meeting, in Adilabad, Telangana on Monday ***PHOTO: PTI***

is speaking in a manner of triggering animosities between two religions, (it means) defeat is haunting Narendra Modi. Out of fear (of defeat), Narendra Modi wants to create trouble between religions," he said.

"Modi, who was CM for 13 years and PM for 10 years, does not even know this?," he asked. Speaking at an election rally in support of Congress candidate from Malkajgiri Lok Sabha constituency here Monday evening, Revanth Reddy asked how long the BJP would do politics in the name of Lord Ram, and said those who do "political business in the name of god and religion should be chased away."—*PTI*

PRIYANKA, SHAH TO CAMPAIGN ON SAME DAY IN BENGALURU

BENGALURU, 22 APRIL

Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi will be in Karnataka on Tuesday to address public meetings in Chitradurga and Bengaluru's HSR Layout, with her campaign at the Bengaluru South constituency coinciding with Union Minister Amit Shah's road in the same LS segment.

According to the Congress's Karnataka unit, Gandhi will address a public meeting at Old Middle School ground in the district headquarter town of Chitradurga at 3 pm.

Congress has fielded 68-year-old B N Chandrappa from Chitradurga against BJP candidate Govind Karjol,73, who is a former deputy chief minister. Gandhi will then fly to Bengaluru to address a public meeting at Atal Bihari Vajpayee Play Ground in HSR Layout, which falls under Bengaluru South constituency, at 6 pm. She will seek votes in favour of Congress candidate and former MLA Sowmya Reddy. —*PTI*

Bank account frozen after protests against Adani: Kerala Latin Church

T'puram, 22 April

PHOTO: PTI

Just days before Kerala votes on April 26 in the general elections, the influential Latin Church has said its bank accounts were frozen by the central government after its 2022 protests against Adani Group's Vizhinjam International Seaport, and the account freeze is still hurting it. Vizhinjam, a coastal hamlet in the state capital, had witnessed strong protests against the seaport, which also resulted in violence in November 2022. In a pastoral letter read during Sunday Mass, the Latin church said it was facing a funds crunch due to the freezing of its bank accounts by the authorities. "We are unable to receive funds even for our missionary purposes because, after the Vizhinjam protests, the authorities have frozen our bank accounts. That situation continues even now," the letter, which was read across all the Latin churches, said. The issue of the account freeze was mentioned in the letter seeking financial assistance from believers, for the various expenses of the church. The Lok Sabha elections in Kerala will be held on 26 April. —*PTI*

NCP releases manifesto, will support caste census

MUMBAI, 22 APRIL

The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief Ajit Pawar on Monday released his party's manifesto for the Lok Sabha elections, highlighting that it will support the demand for a caste-based census, an issue its ally BJP has been side-stepping.

Addressing a gathering here, the deputy chief minister said the NCP will also demand the Bharat Ratna, the country's highest civilian award, for the late former Maharashtra chief minister and defence minister Yashvantrao Chavan.

"Our party believes in the right to live as a human irrespective of caste, creed and religion. It believes in equality and unity. The NCP has faith in social reformer Sane Guruji's quote, 'The true religion is to offer love to the world.' We must bring the deprived and backward sections of society into the mainstream. We will demand for a caste-based census," the manifesto stated.

PHOTO: PTI

Pawar said once the party is voted to power, it will demand a caste-based census.

The NCP's former ally, Congress, has been demanding a nationwide caste-based census, while the BJP has been finding ways to counter it.

The NCP is a constituent of the Mahayuti alliance comprising the Shiv Sena and the BJP. —*PTI*

KRISHNA JANMBHOOMI-IDGAH SUIT

Possession of land doesn't make it Wakf's

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

The Hindu side in the matter of Shri Krishna Janmbhoomi and Shahi Eidgah suit countered the Muslim side's contention in the Allahabad High Court on Monday that the dispute is related to a Wakf property.

The property in question was a temple and "after taking forcible possession of the same they started to offer Namaz but by this, the character of land cannot be changed", the counsel for the Hindu side argued, adding it was not a Wakf property and the Wakf Act is not applicable to it.

Since it "is not Wakf property, this court has the jurisdiction to hear the matter", the counsel said.

The Muslim side had questioned the maintainability of the suit, claiming the disputed Shahi Idgah Masjid is a Wakf

The Hindu side submitted that the plea regarding non-maintainability can only be decided after leading evidence ***PHOTO: PTI***

property and thus the jurisdiction to hear the matter is only with the Wakf Tribunal and not the civil court.

Justice Mayank Kumar Jain, who was hearing the petitions on the maintainability of the suit, fixed 30 April as the next date of hearing.

Replying to the arguments from the Muslim side, the Hindu side submitted that the suit is maintainable and the plea regarding non-maintainability can only be decided after leading evidence.

"The plea regarding the application of Places of Worship Act as well as Wakf Act can only be determined by evidence by the parties in suit and cannot be decided while hearing an application under Order 7 Rule 11 of Civil Procedure Code," the counsel submitted.

Earlier, Vishnu Jain, appearing on the Hindu side, had said that merely by saying that now a mosque is there on the property, the Wakf Act will not apply.

The religious character of the property cannot be changed by merely demolishing the structure. He further submitted that it has to be seen and decided whether the alleged Wakf deed is valid or not. —*PTI*

PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

Drunk father-son duo push man off terrace of hotel

BAREILLY, 22 APRIL

A 27-year-old youth was seriously injured after he was allegedly pushed off the first floor of a five-star hotel here by a businessman and his son in an inebriated condition, police said on Monday. The injured man is undergoing treatment in a hospital, while the police have registered a case against the father-son duo and efforts are on to nab them, they added. The victim, Sarthak Agarwal, had gone to attend an engagement ceremony at a hotel in the city's Izzatnagar area on Saturday evening, the police said citing Sanjay Agarwal, a businessman dealing in chemical supply. Textile businessman Riddim Arora and his father Satish Arora, residents of Janakpuri, were present at the same function, they said. Late in the night, the father-son duo in an inebriated condition allegedly abused Agarwal and even beat him up when he objected, the police said. According to the victim's father, Riddim had kicked his son even after he fell unconscious.—*PTI*

NIA raids 9 places in Kashmir in terror case

SRINAGAR, 22 APRIL

The National Investigation Agency on Monday carried out raids at nine locations in Kashmir, including Srinagar, in a terror conspiracy case, officials said here. The case relates to a terror conspiracy involving plans by terrorist organisations and their newly floated offshoots to unleash violence in Jammu and Kashmir by using sticky bombs, improvised explosive devices and small arms, they said.He said digital devices containing large volumes of incriminating data and documents were seized during the raids conducted on the premises of hybrid terrorists and Overground Workers.—*PTI*

MP: 2 killed, 11 injured as cars ram into each other

KHARGONE, 22 APRIL

A 65-year-old woman and her son were killed and 11 others injured when a car collided with an SUV in Madhya Pradesh's Khargone district in the wee hours of Monday, police said.The accident occurred on Bistan Road under Kotwali Police Station limits around 2.30am, an official said.The mother-son duo were travelling from Indore in an SUV when it collided with a car near their home in Khargone, said Ram Naresh Sharma, the in-charge of the district hospital police post. Taj Bi and her son Aamin,48, died on the spot, he said. Two people travelling in the car and nine others in the SUV were injured in the collision, the official said, adding that eight of them were referred to Indore for treatment.—*PTI*

SP man from Aonla booked for fraud, forgery in Bareilly

BAREILLY, 22 APRIL

Two people, including the Samajwadi Party candidate from Uttar Pradesh's Aonla seat, have been booked in a fraud and forgery case here, police said on Monday. They said the First Information Report (FIR) was registered at the Kotwali police station on Sunday following a complaint filed by Abid Ali, the Bahujan Samaj Party candidate from the same Lok Sabha seat. Satyaveer Singh, a resident of Shahjahanpur who had filed unauthorised nomination from the Aonla seat claiming to be a BSP candidate, and SP nominee Neeraj Maurya have been booked under various sections of fraud and forgery, Police Circle Officer (CO) Pankaj Srivastava said. The BSP had announced Ali's candidacy for the Aonla seat and he duly filed his nomination

—PTI

Left to die: MP residents on toxic fumes from landfill

The residents cursed the politicians over garbage mountains

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

Toxic fumes from the Ghazipur landfill on Monday sent local residents gasping for breath and cursing politicians over the garbage mountain that still blights the city.

Thick plumes of smoke still rose skywards from Ghazipur landfill on Monday, hours after a major fire broke out there.

According to the Delhi Fire Service, the landfill witnessed a big fire Sunday evening due to the gases produced in the massive mountain of waste. The fire has been brought under control, Fire Service DG Atul Garg said.

A wall made of tin panels marking the boundary of the landfill also fell as a portion of garbage broke away. The several metres long wall was erected on the poultry market side.

"It's been 15 hours since the fire broke out. This smoke is not any common smoke, it is very poisonous. We are unable to keep our eyes open due to irritation and are breathing with difficulty," Ram Kumar from Gharoli village, close to the landfill, said.

Several residents told PTI Videos that due to smoke they were not able to send their children to the school.

They accused the MCD and the city government of not taking any action to give a better life to them.

Smoke rises after a fire broke out at the Ghazipur landfill site on Sunday, in New Delhi on Monday PHOTO: PTI

"It's been 15 years. Ministers visit us only during elections. But after that not a single one returns to our door to know if we are facing any problem. This landfill is a curse for us. We are forced to suffer foul smells every day. And now this fire has caused several health problems for us. Why do they (ministers) want us to die?" Ilayas Khan said.

Rakesh Kumar, a heart patient, said he had to move to his relative's place because he could not bear the suffocation any longer.

"And this is not only my condition, several people are leaving their house due to the same reason," he said.

Mehfuz said when he purchased a house in the area around 20 years ago, the landfill wasn't this big.

"There was nothing such as this huge landfill now. Why is the government not able to find any proper solution? We are even unable to send our children to school due to smoke," he said. —*PTI*

MEDICAL TERMINATION

SC permits minor to end 30-week pregnancy

- It also set aside the Bombay High Court order declining the plea, filed by the father of the minor, seeking medical termination of her pregnancy.The top court had on 19 April ordered medical examination of the minor

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

The Supreme Court on Monday permitted a 14-year-old alleged rape survivor to undergo medical termination of her almost 30-week pregnancy.

Exercising its powers under Article 142 of the Constitution which empowers it to pass any order necessary for doing complete justice in any case, a bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud directed the dean of the Lokmanya Tilak Municipal Medical College and General Hospital (LTMGH) at Sion in Mumbai to set up a team of doctors immediately for terminating the pregnancy.

It also set aside the Bombay High Court order declining the plea, filed by the father of the minor, seeking medical termination of her pregnancy.

The top court had on 19 April ordered medical examination of the minor.

It had sought a report from Mumbai's Sion hospital about the girl's possible physical and psychological condition if she undergoes medical termination of pregnancy or if she is advised against it.

Under the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act, the upper limit for termination of pregnancy is 24 weeks for married women as well as for those in special categories, including rape survivors, and other vulnerable women, such as the differently abled and minors. —*PTI*

Lakhimpur case: SC says Ashish Mishra at events violates bail terms

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

The Supreme Court on Monday said if Union minister Ajay Kumar Mishra's son Ashish Mishra, one of the accused in the Lakhimpur Kheri violence case, has been physically attending political events, it would be a violation of his bail conditions.

On 25 January last year, the top court had granted interim bail to Ashish Mishra in the "unfortunate ghastly incident" of violence in 2021 at Lakhimpur Kheri, which claimed eight lives.

The apex court had relaxed the interim bail conditions imposed on Ashish Mishra by the trial court and had asked him not to stay either in Uttar Pradesh or in Delhi during the period.

The case pertains to an incident of violence on 3 October, 2021, in which eight people, including four farmers, were killed in Tikunia in Lakhimpur Kheri district of Uttar Pradesh.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and PS Narasimha made the observation after advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for one of the victims, alleged that Mishra was attending political events and distributing tricycles at an event.

Bhushan submitted that Mishra has been violating the bail condition set by the top court which said he can only enter Uttar Pradesh for trial.

"But he has participated in various functions recently, distributing tricycles in Uttar Pradesh. I do not know how this is being allowed. I will file an affidavit and place documents," Bhushan said. —*PTI*

On 25 January last year, the top court had granted interim bail to Ashish Mishra in the "unfortunate ghastly incident" of Lakhimpur PHOTO: X

SC JUNKS PIL SEEKING 3-YEAR LAW COURSE

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

The Supreme Court on Monday refused to entertain a Public interest Litigation (PIL) seeking directions to the Centre and the Bar Council of India to set up an expert committee for exploring the feasibility of conducting a three-year LLB course instead of the existing five-year after class 12. Exciting scholarships*. Your chance to get a meritorious seat at Deeksha.

A bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justice JB Pardiwala said the five-year LLB (Bachelor of Law) course is "working fine" and there was no need to tinker with it. "The plea is allowed to be withdrawn," the CJI said after hearing some arguments from senior advocate Vikas Singh, appearing for lawyer petitioner Ashwini Updhyay. —*PTI*

EARTH DAY

A boy walks on a beach littered with plastic and other waste materials, on Earth Day in Mumbai, on Monday PHOTO: PTI

UP min roughed up while attending village wedding

SANT KABIR NAGAR, 22 APRIL

Uttar Pradesh minister Sanjay Nishad was allegedly attacked by some people when he was visiting a village in the Khalilabad Kotwali Police Station area to attend a wedding, police said on Monday.

A complaint was filed in the matter by the minister's personal secretary Vinod Kumar.

Circle Officer Brijesh Singh, citing the complaint, said Sanjay Nishad was injured in an attack by some people in Mohammadpur Kathar village.

The incident happened late Sunday night, when Sanjay Nishad reached the wedding venue at Jagannath Nishad's place and some people started an argument with him, he said.

During the argument, some of them attacked the minister which resulted in him bleeding from the nose. He was taken to a hospital, where he was given first aid, the CO said.

After the incident, Sanjay Nishad, who is the president of NISHAD party, a constituent of the ruling NDA, held a protest in the premises of the district hospital in Sant Kabir Nagar.

The CO said the police have registered an FIR against six people of the village under sections 147 (rioting), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), and 307 (attempt to murder) of the Indian Penal Code.

Four of them – Raghavendra Yadav, Jai Prakash Yadav, Digvijay Yadav and Abhishek Yadav – have been detained, he said. —*PTI*

BOMBAY HC DENIES BAIL TO RAPE ACCUSED

MUMBAI, 22 APRIL

The Bombay High Court has denied bail to a man arrested for the gang rape of a 15-year-old girl in 2020, citing that mere delay in the trial for serious and grave offences cannot be a ground to grant bail.

A single bench of Justice Madhav Jamdar, in the order on 18 April, said the accused was facing a serious offence, and hence, no case was made out for grant of bail on the ground of long incarceration.

A copy of the order was made available on Monday.

The bench, however, directed the sessions court to complete the trial in the case in nine months. —*PTI*

Siachen is India's capital of valour and bravery, says Rajnath Singh

SIACHEN, 22 APRIL

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday visited the Siachen base camp and called it India's capital of valour and bravery.

Rajnath Singh also interacted with the Armed Forces personnel deployed at Kumar post of Siachen Glacier in Ladakh. He also exchanged sweets with them.

On the occasion, Rajnath Singh said, "I congratulate you for the way you protect the country at the world's highest battlefield, Siachen Glacier.

The land of Siachen is not an ordinary land. It is a symbol of the country's sovereignty and perseverance. It represents our national determination. Our national capital is Delhi,

PHOTO: PTI

Mumbai is our economic capital, and our technological capital is Bengaluru. Siachen is India's capital of valour and bravery."

Rajnath Singh also laid a wreath at the war memorial in Siachen base camp as he paid tribute to the bravehearts.

Army Chief Manoj Pande also accompanied Defence Minister on the occasion.

On the occasion, the chants of 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai' resonated in the air at Kumar's post at Siachen Glacier in Ladakh as jawans raised slogans after interacting with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.

Rajnath Singh was scheduled to visit Siachen on 24 March to celebrate Holi with troops, but due to 'inclement weather', the programme was changed to Leh, where the Defence Minister celebrated the occasion with armed forces at Leh Military station.

The Siachen Glacier is located in the eastern Karakoram range in the Himalayas and is often considered the world's highest battlefield. —*ANI*

Constable tries to douse fire in train coach, dies

MUZAFFARPUR, 22 APRIL

A constable of the Railway Protection Force (RPF) died allegedly while controlling smoke billowing out from an empty coach of a train at Muzaffarpur railway station here on Monday, officials said. The deceased RPF constable has been identified as Vinod Yadav.

CPRO of East Central Railway Birendra Kumar told PTI, "Prima facie it appears that the incident took place when the victim noticed smoke billowing out from a coach of the empty Valsad-Muzaffarpur train at Muzaffarpur railway station at around 7am. Preliminary inputs from the site suggest that he immediately picked up a fire extinguisher....the moment he tried to open the extinguisher, it burst out... this caused him severe injuries."

The entire train was empty when the incident took place, the CPRO said, adding the train had terminated at Muzaffarpur railway station.

PHOTO: PTI

"It was not a fire. It was only smoke billowing out from the coach. The injured RPF constable was immediately taken to the nearest hospital. He succumbed to his injuries while undergoing treatment at the hospital. The smoke coming out from the empty coach was immediately brought under control.

The exact cause of the incident can be known only after a thorough probe. An inquiry will be ordered to ascertain the cause of incident", he said. —*PTI*

BOOST FOR SCHOOLS

80K Kerala teachers to get AI training

T'PURAM, 22 APRIL

The Kerala government will conduct a three-day artificial intelligence (AI) training for the 80,000 state secondary school teachers from May 2.

Under this program, Kerala Infrastructure and Technology for Education (KITE) aims to train 80,000 teachers of classes 8-12 by August 2024.

"A 3-day AI hands-on training for Secondary school teachers in Kerala will commence from May 2 onwards. The training conducted by Kerala Infrastructure and Technology for Education (KITE) aims to empower 80,000 teachers of Classes 8 to 12 with the necessary AI expertise by August 2024," according to a press release.

The AI training focuses on summarisation techniques to simplify complex documents in PDFs, images, and videos and to generate concise summaries that retain crucial information and even create new content using AI tools. Teachers will learn image generation techniques to create and edit subject-specific visuals, transform them into cartoons or paintings, and integrate text with the images, said the press release.

The AI training focuses on summarisation techniques to simplify complex documents PHOTO: PTI

"This is followed by Prompt Engineering and Machine Learning which helps in formulating precise prompts essential for effective utilization of AI tools and also to understand its programming mechanisms respectively by actually doing it," the release stated.Through data visualization, teachers will explore how AI can be harnessed to create presentations and animations, alongside generating and customizing tables, graphs, and charts that cater to specific requirements. Next comes assessment wherein teachers would be equipped with AI techniques for evaluation purposes, enabling them to design various question formats, including unit tests, etc.

"The program will provide a chance to identify potential risks associated with AI while fostering a culture of responsible AI usage. In the training, teachers will also create their avatars to understand the concept of deepfakes while gaining insights into privacy concerns and algorithm bias," said K Anvar Sadath, Chief Executive Officer of KITE.

Each batch will have 25 teachers, who will use their laptops and mobile phones. The G-Suite accounts created for teachers by KITE will be used to ensure data privacy while using AI tools, and they don't have to use their private email IDs and other credentials. —*ANI*

WORLD EARTH DAY

Ragpickers sort waste at a large dump on the World Earth Day, in Guwahati. Earth Day is marked across the globe on 22 April to support environmental conservation efforts ***PHOTO: PTI***

Is Joe Biden's chances of re-election at risk?

ISRAEL-GAZA WAR

Perceptions of Joe Biden's lack of empathy for the suffering of the Palestinian people risks catastrophically undermining the deeply personal image of a generous man that he has so carefully cultivate ***PHOTO: PTI***

Like many leaders before him, US President Joe Biden has had some of these questions thrust on him, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Some have their origins in past administrations, such as the withdrawal from Afghanistan. Most are a mixture of both, such as Israel's retaliation against Gaza and the role of Iran.

Given the magnitude of these intersecting crises and the fact they are happening during a fraught election campaign, it's not surprising Biden's foreign policy is subject to intense scrutiny.

Many analysts trace the start of Biden's foreign policy troubles to what is often described as the "botched" American withdrawal from Afghanistan. In isolation, and despite the entirely avoidable tragedy that has unfolded there, Afghanistan alone is unlikely to have made an electoral impact beyond the hand-wringing of some political pundits.

That is not necessarily the case with the other global crises that now grip the Biden administration – especially its response to Gaza.

This year, the Democratic National Convention returns to Chicago, Illinois. Given the startling parallels between this year and 1968 – when the convention was also held in Chicago – the decision to return to the Windy City seems ominous.

In 1968, foreign policy was at the forefront of several serious and intersecting crises in American democracy.

Reeling from the assassinations of Martin Luther King junior and the leading candidate for the nomination, Robert F Kennedy, the violent backlash to the civil rights movement, and an escalating war in Vietnam, the Democratic Party went to Chicago in crisis.

Anti-war protesters, horrified by American involvement in Vietnam, convened in Chicago hoping to influence the outcome of the nomination process. The convention descended into chaos and violence, much of it committed by police, who arrested 650 protesters.

The Democratic nominee, incumbent Vice President Hubert Humphrey, went on to lose the election to Richard Nixon.

Though the history and context of the United States' role in the Middle East is vastly different from that of Vietnam, there are important domestic parallels.

As with Vietnam, today's Democratic Party is riven by division over the Biden administration's response to Gaza. In the Michigan state primary in February, more than 100,000 Democrats voted "uncommitted" as part of a co-ordinated campaign to send a message to Biden, demanding he do more to stop the slaughter of Palestinians in Gaza. In the 2020 election, Biden won Michigan by just over 150,000 votes.

The ongoing, peaceful disruption of Democratic campaign events by protesters is likely to continue and extend to the convention in August. Dissent is critical to the health of democracies, but media coverage will surely not frame protests in that way. Intra-party division is likely to be presented negatively. That coverage will continue to shape broader perceptions of the strength and endurance of Biden's leadership.

His Republican challenger, Ronald Reagan, successfully exploited Carter's weaknesses, promising to "make America great again".

Like Humphrey in 1968, Carter lost in a landslide. The hostages were released on the day of Reagan's inauguration. That timing was not a coincidence. Conventional commentary about Carter's apparent weakness often fails to note that, after the failed rescue attempt, the Carter administration engaged in protracted, contentious negotiations with Iran right up to the dying day of his presidency. It was those negotiations that ultimately resulted in a deal to release the hostages. Significant questions remain about the Reagan campaign's role in the resolution of the crisis.Biden promised to restore America's role as a force for good in the world after four chaotic years under Donald Trump. He reassured Americans the "beacon" of American global leadership could be relit.

Polling suggests around two-thirds of Americans support an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. Biden's political inability and personal unwillingness to distance the United States from Israel, and his administration's ongoing refusal to put conditions on military aid, is breaking apart the loose voting coalition that brought him to power. He will need this coalition to hold, and to turn out to vote, if he is to win re-election.

More broadly, perceptions of Biden's lack of empathy for the suffering of the Palestinian people, particularly children, risks catastrophically undermining the deeply personal image of a compassionate, generous man that he has so carefully cultivated. That image was central to his appeal to voters in 2020.

This means the incumbent president faces a kind of pincer movement.

Courtesy, The Conversation

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR سالار

Greater Noida a hotspot for setting up meth labs?

According to police, these recoveries could be just the 'tip of the iceberg' of an international drug syndicate ***PHOTO: PTI***

In the last one year, police have busted three meth labs that were set up by foreigners inside rented accommodations in Greater Noida and seized more than 100 kg of drugs worth hundreds of crores.

The latest such raid was carried out on April 17 in which four Nigerian nationals were held and 26.67 kg of methylenedioxyphenethylamine, or MDMA, worth Rs 100 crore was seized.

Police recovered over 75 kg of MDMA, also known as ecstasy or molly, in two separate but linked raids on May 16 and May 30 last year, arresting around a dozen foreigners from residential houses where proper labs were set up for cooking meth.

The cooked meth in these two episodes was collectively valued at over Rs 350 crore, according to police.

According to police, these recoveries could be just the "tip of the iceberg" of an international drug syndicate.

In all these incidents, they found that meth in "pure form" was cooked by foreigners who worked in the lower rung of the syndicate.

This meth was sent to their contact person in Delhi and from there to Europe through channels that are yet to be investigated, an officer involved in the investigation said.

"Using the raw material which was provided to them by their contacts in Delhi, the accused in Greater Noida cooked the meth. It was dried inside the houses and then given the form of a solid brick of six inch by one inch before being parcelled out to their networks in Delhi who met them on need-to-know basis," the officer said.

At least three of the several police personnel that PTI spoke to, concurred that Greater Noida, because of its less-dense residential facilities and easy connectivity to Delhi, served as an ideal place for manufacturing the drug.

"In all three cases, the houses rented by the foreigners were in isolated locations and had open area on at least three-sides so that the pungent smell emanating due to meth cooking does not catch attention of people living close by," an officer said.

What also made Greater Noida a perfect place for the activity was availability of some raw materials, which are difficult to procure abroad.

For instance, the availability of Ephedrine, a medication and stimulant which is prohibited under the NDPS Act and whose sale is also banned by the government.

Ephedrine, although available for pharmaceutical purposes, comes with a lot of regulation.

A police officer said the drug costs Rs 80,000 to Rs 90,000 per kg but is sold in black market for Rs 2 lakh to Rs 3 lakh per kg. It is be difficult to procure in Europe and even when it is up for sale, it would cost Rs 8 lakh to Rs 10 lakh per kg.

"The profit margin by operating here is more than double. Also, the meth is second most expensive to cocaine and what they cooked here in Greater Noida was not meant for local supply but was to be exported," the officer added.

Police are now investigating how the foreigners procured Ephedrine locally.

During their latest raid, police also found that the drug suppliers were using some less-known shopping apps to parcel the cooked meth. Their associates, whether in India or abroad, simply placed order for a product and gave a foreign location as delivery address.

"Once the meth reached Delhi, it was concealed in the sole of shoes, or creatively concealed inside hair extensions, or neatly ticked inside bales of textile clothes that are exported in bulk. It's difficult to detect the drugs, though agencies have thwarted many such attempts with the use of intelligence and insider network," he said.

According to police, all persons arrested in the three cases are currently in jail. *—PTI*

Police also found that the drug suppliers were using some less-known shopping apps to parcel the cooked meth ***PHOTO: PTI***

'Children of the Ganges' - the boatmen of Varanasi

The boatmen community faced oppression not only under colonial British rule but also as a result of social and political subjugation in postcolonial India ***PHOTO: AL JAZEERA***

"Hum paani ke jeev hain. We are creatures of water," says 29-year-old Vishwakarma Sahni.

Sahni belongs to Varanasi's community of approximately 8,000 mallah, the boatmen whose lives are deeply intertwined with the Ganges - a river considered sacred in India and which they hold in profound reverence.

To them, the Ganges is not merely a river; it is their lifeline.

On its journey eastward from the Himalayas, the Ganges traverses more than 2,500 km before flowing into the Bay of Bengal in the northeastern Indian Ocean. Along its route, it passes through several regions, including the ancient city of Varanasi, also known as Kashi or Banaras in Hindi. "Banaras" is derived from the word "Banarasi" in the Pali language.

Varanasi has long fascinated historians, anthropologists, artists and storytellers and is often celebrated as one of the world's oldest inhabited cities. It also happens to be the constituency of India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, who rode to power in 2014 with a promise to transform Varanasi into a Kyoto-style smart city, and who is facing elections again from later this month. However, the lives of Varanasi's boatmen have remained largely overlooked, they say.

In 2018, despite widespread protests from the community, the Government of India granted permits to three private cruise ships to operate along the ghats of Varanasi - the small staircases which descend to quays and cremation facilities along the river.

The boatmen say their livelihoods have been badly disrupted as a result. The mallah, who identify themselves as Gangaputras or "sons of the Ganges" believe the state should have involved them in decision-making processes before implementing any changes to boating-related activities on the riverfront.

In recent years, the government has granted operation licences to several more luxury liners amidst protests from the boatmen. The boatmen fear that more private players will be introduced to riverfront activities, depriving them of what has been their sole source of income for centuries.

The boatmen community faced oppression not only under colonial British rule but also as a result of social and political subjugation in postcolonial India.

Under British rule, the mallah were classified as a "criminal caste", bringing stereotypes about alcoholism and "unruliness" which continue to cast a shadow over the community. Within Hindu society, they are relegated to the status of a "lower caste".

Most boatmen experience poverty, as their earnings from rowing boats are often insufficient to support themselves and their families.

From August to October every year, the ghats are entirely submerged. During this period, the government imposes a complete ban on boating, forcing the mallah to rely solely on savings from the rest of the year. This period marks the most challenging time of the year for them.

To supplement their income, they often take on additional jobs, such as transporting firewood used in cremations at Manikarnika Ghat, one of the most sacred ghats in Varanasi, where cremations are carried out around the clock. This work is gruelling and yields roughly 300 rupees a day taking a significant toll on their bodies, as they often carry loads of as much as 100kg.

Most of the boatmen here aspire for their children to move away from the boating profession. "I have toiled all my life like a labourer. I hope my children find a different path," says 50-year-old boatman Santosh Sahni, who sets aside some of his daily earnings to pay for his children to go to school.The most impoverished among the mallahs are the gotakhors (coin divers), who have no boats of their own and instead earn a living by diving into the Ganges to collect coins tossed into the river by pilgrims as religious offerings.

They hold their breath for long periods while plunging into the river - an act which can be fraught with danger and has resulted in many deaths from drowning. Due to their close association with the river, many mallahs possess exceptional diving skills and are often employed by the authorities to undertake the grim task of retrieving deceased bodies from the river, typically in exchange for a meagre sum of money or bottles of cheap alcohol.

Death is a frequent occurrence in the Ganges. Some meet accidental deaths, while others choose to end their lives in the river due to the belief that death in the sacred river brings moksha (liberation).

The mallah walks a tightrope of uncertainty, where death can come knocking in many forms; disease, drowning and destitution are most common.

Losing the main breadwinner to dangerous work and lack of healthcare can plunge an entire family into dire financial straits. "Everything fell apart," says Suman Sahni, 35, speaking of her husband, Mohan Sahni's death from throat cancer in 2022. Mohan mounting medical expenses compelled his wife, a mother of three, to sell the boat he owned. To meet household expenses, her 17-year-old son, Sunny Sahni, has taken up gotakhori, while her 15-year-old daughter, Kusum Sahni, sells garlands near the ghats. It is common for women in the community to engage in various jobs to supplement their household income but Devi's is one of the few families within the community where young women actually go out of the home to work. While she, herself, strings beads to craft lockets from her home, which are are later sold in the wholesale market, her daughter, Janaki, works as a salesperson in a city shopping mall. "I never had the opportunity for education, but I ensured my girls received it," she says.

Courtesy, Al-Jazeera

PHOTO: X/@MARIONAWFAL

N Korea fires missile into ocean, says South Korea

SEOUL, 22 APRIL

North Korea fired a ballistic missile toward its eastern waters on Monday, South Korea's military said, the latest in a recent series of weapons launches by the North. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the launch occurred on Monday but gave no further details, such as how far the missile flew. North Korea in recent months has been maintaining an accelerated pace in weapons testing as it continues to expand its military capabilities amid stalemated diplomacy with the United States and South Korea. North Korea announced Saturday that it tested a "super-large" cruise missile warhead and a new anti-aircraft missile in a western coastal area on Friday. *—AP*

3 Germans arrested on suspicions of spying for China

BERLIN, 22 APRIL

Three people suspected of spying for China and facilitating the transfer of information on technology with potential military uses were arrested in Germany on Monday. Prosecutors said that the three German citizens are accused of having acted for Chinese intelligence since some point before June 2022. They are also suspected of violating German export laws. One of the suspects, identified only as Thomas R. in line with German privacy laws, was allegedly an agent for an employee of China's Ministry of State Security and procured information in Germany on "militarily usable innovative technologies" for that person, federal prosecutors said in a statement. To do that, prosecutors said, he used Herwig F and Ina F, a couple who own a company in Duesseldorf that was used to contact and work with German researchers. *—AP*

Mexico's Prez candidate stopped by masked men

TAPACHULA, 22 APRIL

Masked men stopped a vehicle carrying Mexico's leading presidential candidate while she was travelling between campaign stops Sunday to ask that she address the violence in the southern state of Chiapas if she wins the 2 June election. Former Mexico City Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum, the governing Morena party's candidate, remained in the front passenger seat of the vehicle listening calmly with her window down. Masked men filmed the interaction on their cell phones and one shook her hand before letting her move on. The men, who identified themselves as local residents, said they felt "powerless" because the government has not done enough to provide security. *—AP*

Indonesia airport reopens as volcano threat alert lowers

MANADO, 22 APRIL

Indonesian authorities reopened an international airport near a volcano that erupted last week as they lowered a warning level on Monday. Sam Ratulangi airport has been closed since Thursday due to eruptions at nearby Mount Ruang. Indonesia's Disaster Management Agency lowered the volcano's alert level from four, the second-highest level, to three, but said residents were still ordered to remain at least 4 kilometers (2.7 miles) away from the mountain. More than 3,000 residents have been evacuated since Thursday due to dangers including ash, falling rocks, hot volcanic clouds and fears of a tsunami. A joint team from the local authorities combed the villages surrounding the volcano and evacuated residents by boat. Danger continued with the possibility of small-scale eruptions, which could cause rock slides and other damage in the immediate area of the volcano. *—AP*

Israeli military intelligence chief resigns

Aharon Haliva is the first senior Israeli figure to step down after the war on Gaza began

TEL AVIV, 22 APRIL

The head of Israel's military intelligence directorate resigned on Monday over the failures surrounding Hamas' unprecedented 7 October attack, the military said, becoming the first senior figure to step down over his role in the deadliest assault in Israel's history.

Maj Gen Aharon Haliva's resignation sets the stage for what's expected to be more fallout from Israel's top security brass over Hamas' attack, when militants blasted through Israel's border defences, rampaged through Israeli communities unchallenged for hours and killed 1,200 people, most civilians, while taking roughly 250 hostages into Gaza. That attack set off the war against Hamas in Gaza, now in its seventh month. The military said in a statement that Haliva had asked to end his service "following his leadership responsibility." Shortly after the war, Haliva had publicly said that he shouldered blame for not preventing the assault as the head of the military department responsible for providing the government and the military with intelligence warnings and daily alerts.

The military said that the military chief of staff accepted Haliva's request to resign PHOTO: X/@TRTWORLD

The military said in the statement that the military chief of staff accepted Haliva's request to resign and thanked him for his service. Haliva, as well as other military and security leaders, were widely expected to resign in response to the glaring failures that led up to 7 October and those that made it such a devastating attack.

But the timing of the resignations is unclear, because Israel is still fighting Hamas in Gaza and battling the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah in the north. Tensions with Iran are also at a high following attacks between the two enemies.

While Haliva and others have accepted blame for failing to stop the attack, others have stopped short, most notably Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has said he will answer tough questions about his role but has not outright acknowledged any responsibility for allowing the attack to unfold. *—AP*

Netanyahu vows to reject any US sanctions on army

PALESTINE, 22 APRIL

Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to reject any sanctions on the country's military, after reports that the US plans to cut aid to one unit.

"I will fight it with all my strength," the Prime Minister said on Sunday. Earlier, the Axios news site said the US would target Israel's Netzah Yehuda battalion over alleged human rights violations in the occupied West Bank. BBC understands any move would come under a US ban on aid to foreign units credibly implicated in violations. When asked last week about reports that US military aid to the Israel Defence Forces' units could be cut over allegations of human rights abuses in the occupied West Bank, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said: "I've made determinations; you can expect to see them in the days ahead". *—BBC News*

Benjamin Netanyahu PHOTO: PTI

- BBC understands any move would come under a US ban on aid to foreign units credibly implicated in violations. When asked last week about reports that US military aid to the Israel Defence Forces' units could be cut over allegations of human rights abuses in the occupied West Bank

ÁT LEAST 4 KILLED

1,10,000 evacuated amid massive China floods

BEIJING, 22 APRIL

Authorities have evacuated nearly 1,10,000 people from their homes in Guangdong, as days of heavy rain caused massive flooding in China's most populous province.

Three people have died so far, while 11 have gone missing, according to state media. Footage on state media and online show large swathes of land inundated by the floods and rescuers ferrying people on lifeboats in waist-deep water.

Several major rivers have burst their banks, and authorities are closely monitoring "dangerously high" water levels. They had warned that the level of a river in northern Guangdong could hit a "once in 100 years" peak on Monday morning, though this had yet to materialise by noon.

Much of Guangdong is part of the low-lying Pearl River delta, which is prone to floods due to the rise in sea levels and storm surges. The delta is a major manufacturing base in China and one of the country's most densely-populated regions, with Guangdong alone home to around 127 million people.

Provincial capital Guangzhou as well as smaller cities Shaoguan and Heyuan were among the worst hit. Across the province about 1.16 million households lost power over the weekend, but 80% had their electricity restored by Sunday night.

Several major rivers have burst their banks, and authorities are closely monitoring "dangerously high" water levels PHOTO: XINHUA

Flights have been cancelled and delayed at Baiyun International Airport in Guangzhou due to continuous rain, while schools have been ordered shut in at least three cities. Dozens of homes across the province have either collapsed or have been severely damaged, with authorities estimating a direct economic loss of nearly $19.8 million.

A Weibo user said her family scrambled to move furniture from the first storey of their house to upstairs. "The heavy rains have flooded half of the first storey of our home," the user wrote on Sunday night. "I wonder if the second storey would also be flooded overnight. I feel helpless."

"It rained like a waterfall for one and a half hours on the highway when I was driving home last night," said another user on Weibo. "I couldn't see the road at all." China's meteorological authorities have warned that heavy rains will continue in Guangdong and coastal areas of neighbouring Fujian until at least Tuesday. *—BBC News*

Pro-China party secures Maldives polls

MALE, 22 APRIL

Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu's party won 71 seats and secured a "super majority" in parliamentary elections, preliminary results suggested on Monday, a victory seen as a strong endorsement of his pro-Beijing foreign policy, as both India and China closely watched the outcome of the polls in the archipelago nation.

Muizzu-led People's National Congress (PNC) won 68 out of 93 seats in Sunday's polls and its coalition partners Maldives National Party (MNP) and Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) won one and two seats, respectively, which is more than two-thirds of the Parliament, landing the party an easy supermajority with the power to amend the Constitution.

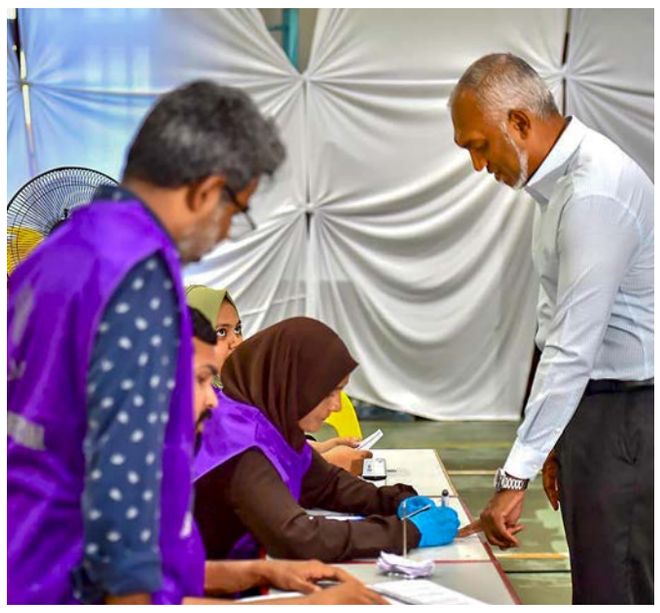
Local media, which has described his party's win as a "supermajority", said the PNC is set to celebrate its landslide victory here on an artificial beach on Monday night.

The Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), led by former president Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, who is seen as a pro-India leader, held 65 seats in the previous parliament but won only 15 seats this time, Mihaaru, a news website, reported. Muizzu, 45, known for his pro-China leanings, has said that he wants to reduce India's influence in his country.

A total of 368 candidates were in the fray, including 130 independent candidates, 10 candidates from Jumhoory Party (JP), 39 from The Democrats, Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) 4, Adhaalath Party (AP) 4, and Maldives National Party (MNP) 2 nominees in the parliamentary election in Maldives, which has a strategic location in the Indian Ocean.

About 40 in numbers- 10.76 per cent- of the candidates were women. Provisional results have shown that only three women candidates secured seats out of the 93 constituencies in the 20th People's Majlis.

Saudha is a family member of Muizzu. Asma and Anara have previously served as MPs in the 18th People's Majlis. With about 75 per cent of the eligible voters casting their ballots, Sunday's election saw a record-low voter turnout, provisional results suggested. *—AP*



Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu's party won 71 seats and secured a "super majority" in parliamentary elections PHOTO: PTI

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi PHOTO: PTI

IRAN PREZ ARRIVES IN PAK ON 3-DAY OFFICIAL VISIT

ISLAMABAD, 22 APRIL

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on Monday arrived in Pakistan on a three-day official visit to promote cooperation, months after the two neighbours carried out tit-for-tat airstrikes against alleged terrorist hideouts on rival lands.

Raisi, the first head of state of any country to visit Pakistan after the February 8 general elections, was accorded a warm welcome at the Islamabad Airport and was received by Housing Minister Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada and Pakistan's Ambassador to Iran Mudassir Tipu, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs posted on social media platform X. The Iranian president is accompanied by his spouse and a high-level delegation comprising the foreign minister and other members of the Cabinet and senior officials, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said.

President Raisi has an extensive programme in Pakistan and is scheduled to meet President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Senate Chairman Yusuf Raza Gilani and Speaker of the National Assembly Ayaz Sadiq. He will also visit Lahore and Karachi and meet with the provincial leadership, the Foreign Office said. "Upon arrival at the Prime Minister House, a guard of honour will be presented to the visiting dignitary," report said. The Iranian President and Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz will plant a sapling in the Prime Minister's House on the occasion of Earth Day, it said, adding that they would also attend the signing ceremony of memorandums of understanding between the two countries for cooperation in various fields. *—PTI*

SL junks charge of lax probe in 2019 attack

COLOMBO, 22 APRIL

Sri Lanka Police on Monday rejected accusations that its investigations are poor and lead to a cover-up rather than finding the culprits of the 2019 Easter Sunday suicide bombing that killed 270 people, including Indians.

Responding to criticism levelled at the alleged pussyfooting on probes, police spokesman Nihal Thalduwa told reporters that the police had put up their maximum efforts to conduct proper investigations.

Sri Lanka PHOTO: FREEPIK

"This is not an investigation conducted by the police on its own. The police take advice from the attorney general, and periodically, the progress is reported to the court," Thalduwa said.

At the fifth anniversary of the attacks on Sunday, the head of the local church, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, reiterated his dissatisfaction over the investigation, claiming the authorities had failed to reveal the conspiracy behind the attacks.

He said the Church has plans to propose at the UN rights body in Geneva to initiate an international investigation into the incident where 270 people, including foreigners, were killed.

"The police need evidence to act against individuals. *—PTI*

7 killed as motorsports race car hits crowd in SL

COLOMBO, 22 APRIL

- Five people were killed at the scene while two later died in hospital. Others remain in a critical condition, officials said

Seven people have been killed and 21 injured after a race car ploughed into spectators at a motor event in Sri Lanka.

The crash occurred at the Fox Hill Supercross race on Sunday in Diyatalawa, an army base town. Among the dead were four race officials as well as spectators, including an eight-year-old girl, the army said.

Few details have been released about the driver, his condition and whether he will face charges. But authorities said a full police investigation was underway into the crash on the army-owned track. Diyatalawa, in central southern Sri Lanka is a former garrison town and the military maintains an academy there.

"This accident happened when the car jumped out of the running lane," police spokesman Nihal Talduwa said, according to BBC Sinhala. According to witnesses, the crash happened soon after another car had overturned on the track.

Officials tried to slow cars down around the scene by waving yellow lights, but as the cars sped past, one red car veered off course and crashed into spectators on the side of the unguarded track. Footage widely shared on social media showed the aftermath of the tragedy - screams in the crowd and people rushing to the scene.

Five people were killed at the scene while two later died in hospital. Others remain in a critical condition, officials said. *—BBC News*

SOUTH CHINA SEA

US, Philippine forces launch combat drills

MANILA, 22 APRIL

American and Filipino forces launched their largest combat exercises in years Monday in a show of allied firepower near the disputed South China Sea that has alarmed Beijing. The annual exercises by the longtime treaty allies will run until 10 May and involve more than 16,000 of their military personnel, along with more than 250 French and Australian forces.

While the Philippine military maintains that the Balikatan — Tagalog for "shoulder-to-shoulder" — trainings are not directed at a particular country, some of their main conflict scenarios are set in or near the disputed South China Sea, where Chinese and Philippine coast guard and accompanying ships have figured in a series of increasingly tense territorial faceoffs since last year.

The annual exercises by the longtime treaty allies will run until 10 May and involve more than 16,000 military PHOTO: X/@GENTOMSGATES83

In encounters in disputed areas, Chinese coast guard vessels have resorting to water cannons, blocking and other dangerous maneuvers that have caused injuries to Philippine navy personnel and damaged supply boats. Philippine military said a key focus of this year's drills is territorial defence. "We're dead serious about protecting our territory — that's why we do these Balikatan exercises," Col. Michael Logico, who speaks for the Philippine military on the combat drills, told Associated Press.

As the disputes between China and the Philippines have escalated, President Joe Biden and his administration has repeatedly warned that the United States is obligated to defend the Philippines, its oldest treaty ally in Asia, if it is attacked.

US Marine Lt Gen William Jurney said in the ceremony that the large-scale military exercises will demonstrate that the 1951 Mutual Defence Treaty between the US and the Philippines "is no mere piece of paper."

Washington lays no claim to the contested waters but has declared that freedom of navigation and overflight and the peaceful resolution of the disputes are in its national interest. China strongly criticised the exercises, saying the Philippines was "ganging up" with countries from outside Asia in an obvious reference to the United States and its security partners, and warned that the drills could instigate confrontation and undermine regional stability. *—AP*

PHOTO: PTI

Jio Financial shares climb 4%; hit 52-week high

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

Shares of Jio Financial Services Ltd on Monday climbed 4 per cent to hit the 52-week high level after the company reported a 6 per cent increase in consolidated net profit for the fourth quarter ended March 2024. The stock jumped 4 per cent to Rs 385 -- its 52-week high -- on the BSE. On the NSE, the company's stock climbed 3.98 per cent to hit the 52-week high of Rs 384.85. Jio Services Ltd on Friday reported a 6 per cent increase in consolidated net profit to Rs 311 crore for the fourth quarter ended March 2024 on the back of improvement in income. *—PTI*

Century Real Estate raises ₹450cr from Edelweiss

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

Century Real Estate on Monday said it has raised Rs 450 crore from Edelweiss to develop realty projects in Bengaluru. In a statement, the company said it has "successfully closed a funding round with Edelweiss, securing Rs 450 crore in investment capital." Century Real Estate said its sales bookings stood at Rs 1,000 crore in the 2023-24 fiscal, registering 4x growth in a span of 4 years. "The infusion of Rs 450 crore will primarily be allocated towards the development of a new luxury project in the heart of Bengaluru. Part of the funds will also be used towards Century Trails and Century Wintersun Phase II, underlining the commitment to delivering innovative and high-quality residential spaces," it said. Century Real Estate has completed more than 100 lakh square feet of residential, commercial projects across Bengaluru. *—PTI*

Internet users dissatisfied with data speeds

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

Despite India's low-cost and expanding internet accessibility, a recent survey found that over half of internet users are dissatisfied with data speeds and experience connection issues. An overwhelming 70 per cent of these users expressed the desire to switch service providers, the survey said. According to the annual broadband survey by LocalCircles, 86 per cent of users in India primarily connect to the internet at home via fiber, broadband, DSL, or fixed-line connection. However, more than half of these users -- 56 per cent -- reported connection disruption or lower speeds than what they were promised or paying for. The survey, which gathered insights from over 70,000 broadband and fiber consumers across 286 Indian districts, revealed that 39 per cent of respondents said the the "speed received is much lower than what we are paying for", while 47 per cent claimed that it took over 24 hours for their service provider to resolve their complaints. As per the survey, "70 per cent fiber/broadband/DSL/fixed line users say they are willing to switch to an alternate provider for better quality, service, or price". The study said the income generated by telephone and landline services or fixed voice services in India is expected to decrease at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 4 per cent from 2023 to 2028. "The shift towards mobile and over-the-top (OTT) communication services among users, coupled with operators offering complimentary voice minutes within bundled plans, is driving the decline in average revenue per user (ARPU) of fixed voice operators in India," it said. LocalCircles said it plans to share the results with relevant government bodies such as the telecom regulator TRAI, the Ministry of Telecom, and the Department of Consumer Affairs to address the issues faced by consumers. *—PTI*

Sensex jumps over 560 pts, Nifty tops 22,300 level

Nifty rises by 189.40 points or 0.86 per cent

MUMBAI, 22 APRIL

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty climbed nearly 1 per cent each on Monday amid a rally in Asian and European markets, decline in Brent crude oil prices and buying by foreign investors.

Extending its previous day's rebound, the 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 560.29 points or 0.77 per cent to settle at 73,648.62. During the day, it advanced 679.47 points or 0.92 per cent to 73,767.80.

The NSE Nifty went up by 189.40 points or 0.86 per cent to 22,336.40.

From the Sensex basket, Larsen & Toubro, Bajaj Finance, Axis Bank, State Bank of India, UltraTech Cement, Wipro, ICICI Bank, Infosys, HCL Technologies and Asian Paints were the major gainers.

NTPC, JSW Steel and HDFC Bank were the laggards.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 1.26 per cent and midcap index rallied 0.93 per cent.

Utilities emerged as the only laggar PHOTO: PTI

Among the indices, consumer durables advanced 2.53 per cent, industrials (1.93 per cent), capital goods (1.65 per cent), telecommunication (1.17 per cent), financial services (1.04 per cent) and consumer discretionary (1.02 per cent).

Utilities emerged as the only laggard.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory while Shanghai ended lower.

European markets were trading with gains. Wall Street ended on a mixed note on Friday.

"Global equities were mostly higher on Monday as a relief rally was underway as geopolitical risks subsided," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

- In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory while Shanghai ended lower

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.80 per cent to USD 86.59 a barrel.

"The Indian market extended last Friday's relief rally as Middle East tension saw some respite, though the situation remains fluid. The recovery was broad-based across sectors, with renewed interest in mid and smallcaps," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

Oil prices showed some relief but are still at elevated levels, he added.Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers on Friday and they bought equities worth Rs 129.39 crore, according to exchange data.

The BSE benchmark climbed 599.34 points or 0.83 per cent to settle at 73,088.33 on Friday. *—PTI*

AMID IRAN-ISRAEL TENSIONS

Gold and silver retreat from record levels

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

PHOTO: FREEPIK

Gold and silver prices retreated from record high levels in the national capital on Monday, with the precious metal plunging by Rs 450 per 10 grams, due to weak global trends and easing tensions in West Asia.

Gold prices declined by Rs 450 to Rs 73,650 per 10 grams amid weak trends in the overseas markets, according to HDFC Securities. The yellow metal had settled at Rs 74,100 per 10 grams on Friday.

Silver prices also tumbled by Rs 1,100 to Rs 85,500 per kg. In the previous close, it had closed at Rs 86,600 per kg.

"Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 73,650 per 10 grams, down by Rs 450 against the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,365 per ounce, down by USD 26 from the previous close.

Gold resumed trading on a weaker note on Monday as demand for the safe haven asset decreased after easing geopolitical tensions in the Middle East.

Furthermore, a rise in the US dollar and Treasury yields, along with declining expectations from the Federal Reserve's interest rate cuts in 2024, weighed down on precious metal's prices, Gandhi said. *—PTI*

Byju's raised debt to pay March salaries

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

PHOTO: BYJUS.COM

Edtech firm Think and Learn, owner of Byju's brand, credited partial salaries of employees for the month of March, according to sources.

Byju Raveendran, the Founder and CEO of Think and Learn, has raised debt in his personal capacity to pay the salaries of employees for March.

Byju's salary expenses for partial payouts is estimated to be in the range of Rs 25-30 crore.

The salary was credited on Saturday in the account of employees.

According to the source, the amount paid is between 50-100 per cent of salary.

"Byju raised more personal debt to pay salaries this month. While the rights issue money is still blocked by the foreign investors, " a source said.

"Teachers and people at the lower end of the pyramid have been paid 100 per cent," the source said.

The company had raised $200 million through a rights issue to meet its operational requirements, including expenses related to employees' salaries.

A group of four investors -- Prosus, General Atlantic, Sofina, and Peak XV -- along with the support from other shareholders, including Tiger and Owl Ventures, have approached NCLT against the founders as well as the rights issue which may lead to change in shareholding pattern in the company.

The hearing in the matter before the court is scheduled on April 23.

"Paying salary through debt is not a sustainable model. The situation will become more complicated after the court goes on leave," a source said. *—PTI*

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Zomato hikes platform fee to ₹5%, terms it 'business calls'

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

Zomato has received Rs 227.85 crore tax demand orders PHOTO: PTI

Zomato has hiked its platform fee by 25 per cent to Rs 5 per order from Rs 4 in select markets, citing it as a part of business calls taken by the food tech giant.

According to the company's app, it has also paused its intercity food delivery service 'Intercity Legends'.

This comes days before it is slated to announce the results for the quarter that ended in March.

When reached out for a comment, a Zomato spokesperson told PTI, "These are business calls which we take basis various factors from time to time".

Notably, the food delivery platform has received various tax demand orders aggregating to Rs 227.85 crore since 15 March, separate regulatory filings showed.

In February, Zomato reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 138 crore for the December quarter.

The company is expected to announce the fourth (January-March) quarter results next month. According to company sources, the hike in platform fees applies to major cities like Delhi-NCR, Bengaluru, Mumbai and Hyderabad, among others. *—PTI*

PHOTO: FREEPIK

INDIA EXPORTED RECORD OILMEALS IN 2023-24

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

Despite a decline in exports of many agricultural commodities, the export of soybean meal has revived while that of rapeseed meal has seen a remarkable growth in the last three years.

Oilmeals are the residue left over after the extraction of oil from oilseeds and it is widely utilized as livestock feed globally.

India exported a record 48.8 lakh tonnes of oil meals in the just-concluded financial year 2023- 24, with rapeseed meal being the outstanding performer, said the edible oil industry body Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA).

Indian soybean meal emerged as a highly competitive commodity in the international market, leading to a surge in export volume to 21.33 lakh tons, up from 10.22 lakh tons in the previous year.

According to the edible oil industry body, major importers include Bangladesh, South Korea, Thailand, and Iran.

It asserted that had deoiled rice bran not been banned since August 2023, the industry would have exported an additional 3-4 lakh tons during the financial year. The government's move was intended apparently to address inflation in milk prices. De-oiled rice bran, extracted from rice bran, is widely used as a nutrition product for feeding cattle, and other animals.Industry body SEA said it has commissioned RMSI Cropalytics to conduct independent surveys and estimate rapeseed-mustard crops for the year 2023-24.

The latest report estimates a crop of over 120.9 lakh tonnes across an acreage of over 100 lakh hectares, with Rajasthan leading in production followed by Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Haryana. *—ANI*

Wipro shares jump 14% post-Q3 earnings

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

Shares of Wipro on Monday jumped nearly 14 per cent, adding Rs 18,168.68 crore to its market valuation, after the IT company's December quarter earnings beat estimates.

The stock zoomed 13.10 per cent to reach its 52-week high of Rs 526.45 on the BSE.

At the NSE, it rallied 13.65 per cent to Rs 529 — its 52-week peak.

It was the biggest gainer among the Sensex and Nifty firms. The company's market capitalisation (mcap) jumped Rs 18,168.68 crore to Rs 2,61,217.37 crore in early deals.

Other IT stocks — Tech Mahindra, Infosys, HCL Technologies, and Tata Consultancy Services — also saw frenzied buying.The BSE Information Technology index traded nearly 2 per cent higher.

Benchmark equity indices hit record peaks in early trade on Monday, with the Sensex breaching the 73,000 milestone for the first time and the Nifty surging past the 22,000-mark, driven by a sharp rally in IT stocks. *—PTI*

Sustained growth of 7% feasible for India, says RBI

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

Sustaining the economic growth momentum of 7 per cent in 2024-25 and beyond is feasible on the back of favorable monsoon, higher farm productivity and improved global trade, RBI Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) member Shashanka Bhide said on Monday.

During 2023-24, the economy is likely to record a growth rate of near 8 per cent on account of good performance of manufacturing and infrastructure sectors.

"(India's economic) Growth in the current year is likely to be supported by agriculture with a favourable monsoon and improved global trade. Sustaining the growth momentum of 7 per cent seems feasible," he told PTI.

Bhide further said that in the long-term, the need for productivity improvements will remain the key factor to achieve food price stability.

Asked what are some of the headwinds he is wary of, Bhide said one area of concern is the global environment.

"The slow pace of recovery in global demand on one hand and supply chain disruptions on the other hand... if the ongoing geopolitical conflicts are not resolved quickly, (it will) pose significant challenge in terms of demand as well as input prices.

PHOTO: PTI

"We should also be prepared for minimising the adverse impact of extreme weather events on output," he said.

Recently, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) raised India's growth projection to 6.8 per cent for 2024 from its January forecast of 6.5 per cent citing bullish domestic demand conditions and a rising working-age population.

Asked what is the long-term solution for high food prices, Bhide noted that one aspect of high food inflation in the recent years has been the impact of weather conditions on the perishable commodities such as vegetables.

FDI inflows to China have fallen dramatically from a share of 12.5 per cent in the first nine months of 2022 to only 1.7 per cent in the same period of 2023. *—PTI*

AFTER SINGAPORE BAN

FSSAI to check MDH and Everest spices

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

The Hong Kong's Centre for Food Safety has asked consumers not to buy these products PHOTO: MDH/EVEREST

Food safety regulator (FSSAI) has started taking samples of spices in powder form of all brands, including MDH and Everest, from across the country in view of quality concerns flagged by Singapore and Hong Kong, a government source said.

"In view of the current development, FSSAI has taking samples of spices of all brands, including MDH and Everest, from the market to check whether they meet the FSSAI norms," the source told PTI.

FSSAI does not regulate quality of exported spices, they said.

FSSAI, which operates under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, takes samples of spices regularly from the market to check the quality of product sold in the domestic market.

Meanwhile, the Spices Board of India is looking into the ban imposed by Hong Kong and Singapore on the sale of four spices-mix products of Indian brands MDH and Everest, which allegedly contain pesticide 'ethylene oxide' beyond permissible limits.

"We are looking into the matter. We are at it," Spices Board of India Director A B Rema Shree told PTI.

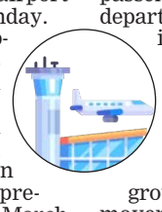
The companies could not be contacted immediately.

The Hong Kong's Center for Food Safety (CFS) has asked consumers not to buy these products and traders not to sell, while the Singapore Food Agency has directed a recall of such spices. *—PTI*

Traffic at Mumbai airport rises 16%

MUMBAI, 22 APRIL

Passenger traffic at Mumbai airport rose 16 per cent year-on-year to 52.8 million in FY24, the airport operator said on Monday.



The Adani Group-AAI owned city's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA) had handled 43.9 million passengers in the preceding fiscal ended March 2023.

The total number of passengers was based on the movement of aircraft at both arrival and departure terminals of the airport.

Of the total footfall of 52.8 million, the number of arriving passengers was 26 million, while 26.7 million passengers were those who departed from the airport, it said.

The surge was seen in both domestic and international passenger traffic, the operator said.

During FY24, the growth in the air traffic movements (ATMs) was recorded at 12 per cent at 3,24,972 as compared to 2,90,387 a year ago period, CSMIA said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

BCCI fines Virat Kohli 50% of his match fee

KOLKATA, 22 APRIL

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on April 22 fined Virat Kohli 50 percent of match fees on Virat Kohli for a Level 1 offense under Article 2.20 of the IPL's Code of Conduct. The decision was taken after Kohli challenged the umpire's decision on his controversial dismissal at Eden Gardens in the match against Kolkata Knight Riders."Virat Kohli, Batter, Royal Challengers Bengaluru has been fined 50 percent of his match fees for breaching the IPL Code of Conduct.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Du Plessis, Curran fined for IPL Code of Conduct breaches

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

Royal Challengers Bengaluru skipper Faf Du Plessis has copped a Rs 12 lakh fine, while the Punjab Kings captain has been penalized 50 percent of his match fees for their respective offenses, the IPL announced on Monday. Du Plessis was fined for maintaining a slow over rate during RCB's thrilling one-run loss, their seventh of the ongoing season, to Kolkata Knight Riders at the Eden Gardens on Sunday. Curran, on the other hand, was fined half of his match fees for a Level 1 offence under Article 2.8 of the IPL's Code of Conduct which refers to "showing dissent at an umpire's decision" during PBKS' three-wicket loss to Gujarat Titans —*PTI*

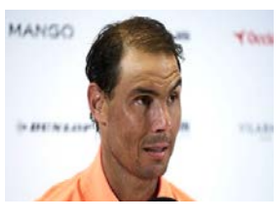


PHOTO: AFP

Nadal will play at Laver Cup in Berlin in September

BERLIN, 22 APRIL

Rafael Nadal said Monday he will play at the Laver Cup in Berlin in September in what may be one of the 22-time Grand Slam champion's last tournaments. Nadal has signaled 2024 may be his last year on tour and said last week that his second-round loss to Alex de Minaur at the Barcelona Open, which he has won 12 times, was "probably my last match here." "At this stage in my career I want to go out there and make the most of every opportunity I am given," Nadal said in a statement.—*AP*

India clinch 10 medals at USA pickleball meet

MUMBAI, 22 APRIL

Stavya Bhasin, Dhiren Patel, and Hemal Jain won a gold each in their respective categories as India returned with 10 medals from the US Open Pickleball Championship. Overall, India won three gold, three silver, and four bronze medals in the tournament held in Florida from April 14-20. Bhasin won the gold in junior singles, Patel finished first in the men's singles 5.0 and Jain grabbed the top prize in the men's singles 3.5 category.—*PTI*

THE FUTURE IS HERE

All hail D Gukesh on winning the Candidates Chess PHOTO: PTI

Accolades pour in for Gukesh after historic win

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

People from all walks of life, including the chess community, went into a frenzy as they hailed India's D Gukesh as a potential "future world champion" after he etched his name in the history books by winning the prestigious Candidates tournament in Toronto.

Gukesh drew with American Hikaru Nakamura in the final round to not only win the prestigious tournament but also become the youngest-ever challenger to the world title at 17.

Five-time world champion and the only other Indian to win the Candidates, the legendary Viswanathan Anand was one of the first people to congratulate the teenager.

"Congratulations to @DGukesh for becoming the youngest challenger. The @WacaChess family is so proud of what you have done. I'm personally very proud of how you played and handled tough situations. Enjoy the moment," Anand wrote on 'X'.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi also hailed Gukesh's inspirational win.

"India is exceptionally proud of @DGukesh on becoming the youngest-ever player to win the #FIDECandidates! Gukesh's remarkable achievement at the Candidates in Toronto showcases his extraordinary talent and dedication. His outstanding performance and journey to the top inspire millions," Modi wrote.

Cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar also congratulated Gukesh for his stupendous feat.

"What a triumph, @DGukesh! The youngest ever to win the FIDE Candidates—at only 17! Your journey from here leads to the World Championship, and we'll be with you at every move. Go make history! #FIDECandidates," Tendulkar tweeted.

Gukesh had become the third youngest player in history to earn the Grandmaster title at the age of 12 and English grandmaster David Howell said he knew the prodigiously talented player would go on to do great things from the moment he played his first match against the Indian.

"Congrats to Gukesh on winning the Candidates!! What a tournament I knew he was special ever since our first game. He was just 12 years old (but already a GM!) While analyzing, both his mature attitude and his calculation skills impressed me hugely. Future world champ?" Howell wrote.

Former world champion and Grandmaster Vladimir Kramnik of Russia congratulated Gukesh for his astounding performance. —*PTI*

IPL 2024: LSG eyes a heist in Dhoni's bastion

Revenge will be on defending champions CSK minds

CHENNAI, 22 APRIL

Revenge will be on defending champions Chennai Super Kings' minds when they host an unpredictable Lucknow Super Giants here in their reverse IPL fixture on Tuesday with both the teams desperate to break out of the mid-table logjam.

The last time the two teams faced off in Lucknow last week, KL Rahul and Quinton de Kock put up a record-opening partnership which proved to be the difference as LSG joined CSK at eight points in the IPL standing.

The Super Kings have been a force to be reckoned with at home and they will look to set the record straight this time. Following the away loss, CSK will be eager to redeem themselves in the three consecutive home ties to march towards the playoffs.

For CSK, skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad and Shivam Dube have done the bulk of the scoring and their failure against LSG meant they didn't get a flying start and also struggled in the middle overs.

While opener Rachin Ravindra's form is a concern, CSK also promoted Ajinkya Rahane as the opener and as a result, Gaikwad pushed himself a spot down to three.

Having scored three 50-plus scores as an opener so far, it would once again be a tricky call for Gaikwad to stick to the latest shuffle or promote himself back to the top.

While Ravindra Jadeja stepped up with a composed fifty, which allowed Moeen Ali and MS Dhoni to produce the late fireworks and give the team a fighting total, CSK would hope their top-order gets their act together before they face LSG again.

CSK's bowling unit was at their wits end against the rampaging duo of Rahul and Quinton the other day.

The last time the two teams faced off in Lucknow PHOTO: PTI

Young Matheesha Pathirana was their best bowler but the onus will be on pacers Deepak Chahar, Tushar Deshpande, and Mustafizur Rahman to produce a better show when they face the same opposition again.

Left-arm spinner Jadeja too struggled and will need to step up on their home turf, having done so in the past.

For LSG, batting has been an issue but they have shown how devastating they can be if their top-order fires.

Rahul and Quinton were on a roll and they will once again have to do the heavy lifting at Chepauk. Also, Nicholas Pooran has hit top gear when needed and LSG will bank on him a lot.

In bowling, LSG will hope for the return of young pace sensation Mayank Yadav, who had to sit out of two games after suffering a lower abdominal strain.

—*PTI*

TODAY'S MATCH

Time: 7:30 PM

Where To Watch:

Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: MA Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai

Our target right now is to host the Champions Trophy: PCB chief

KARACHI, 22 APRIL

Mohsin Naqvi PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Mohsin Naqvi has said that the PCB would be open to the idea of playing a bilateral series against India if they send their team to Pakistan for the ICC Champions Trophy next year.Talking to reporters in Lahore during a function, Naqvi was asked about the recent interview of Indian captain Rohit Sharma, in which he praised the Pakistan cricket team and said it would be "awesome" to play the neighbors from across the border in a Test series overseas."-Look, if any options in this regard come, we will consider it, but our target right now is to host the Champions Trophy and first let India come for the tournament," he said."Right now, till the CT, there is no slot available as our team has a packed itinerary. proposal whenever it comes before us," he added. —*AP*

Saurav Ghosal retires from professional squash

NEW DELHI, 22 APRIL

Saurav Ghosal PHOTO: PTI

India's finest men's squash player Saurav Ghosal on Monday announced his retirement from the professional circuit after completing a glittering 22-year journey although he would continue representing the country at multi-discipline events for some more time.

Besides winning two gold medals in team events of the Incheon and Hangzhou Asian Games, Ghosal has three Commonwealth Games medals and also bagged the yellow metal in the 2022 World Doubles Championships in mixed doubles in Glasgow.

"I started my journey on @psaworldtour 22 years ago. At the time, I never thought in my wildest dreams, I would play professional squash for so long. As I traveled across the world, playing on some of the biggest stages our wonderful sport offered, I thought it would never come to an end," 37-year-old Ghosal wrote in a post on his official Instagram handle.

"But, there's always an endpoint. I am overwhelmed with emotions as I write this message. This sport has been my passion, my livelihood, and my identity for so many years. So, with a heart filled with pride and a tinge of sadness, I announce my retirement from the PSA," he added.

Kolkata-born Ghosal also remains the only Indian man to reach the world's top 10, achieving that career-high ranking in April 2019 and spending six months there.

Since making his PSA debut in 2003, Ghosal has lifted 10 PSA titles, reaching 18 finals, while he won 281 of his 511 matches on the PSA Tour.

Ghosal also holds a record of 13 Indian Nationals titles wins, with the last of those coming in 2020.

Ghosal, however, isn't completely done with the sport and hopes to represent the flag for some more years.

—*PTI*

HUMPY FINISHES SECOND IN WOMEN'S CANDIDATE

TORONTO, 22 APRIL

Indian grandmaster Koneru Humpy delivered the goods when it mattered, defeating erstwhile joint leader Tingjie Lei of China to finish second on a superior tiebreak in the women's candidates tournament here.

Zhongyi Tan of China expectedly topped the tables after settling for a draw with Anna Muzychuk of Ukraine.The real story of the day was R Vaishali who scored her fifth victory on the trot at the expense of Kateryna Lagno of Russia to tie for the second spot before finishing fourth on a tiebreak. Tan finished with 9 points in all, 1.5 points clear of the nearest rivals Humpy, Lei, and Vaishali who all finished second to fourth respectively. —*PTI*

Jude brings Madrid to brink of title with Clasico Winner

MADRID, 22 APRIL

Jude Bellingham snatched Real Madrid a dramatic 3-2 Clasico win over champions Barcelona PHOTO: AP

Jude Bellingham snatched Real Madrid a dramatic 3-2 Clasico win over champions Barcelona over Sunday with a "fundamental" goal to take them 11 points clear at the top of La Liga. Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti hailed the England midfielder's decisive intervention to take Los Blancos to the brink of the Spanish title. Madrid twice came from behind with Vinicius Junior and Lucas Vazquez netting to level Andreas Christensen and Fermin Lopez's strike before Bellingham rammed home the winner in stoppage time.

"He arrived at just the right time, he worked so hard in the game, it's been a while since he scored and today he scored a goal that could be fundamental in winning the league," said Ancelotti.

Barcelona, second, bounced back with a strong performance after their Champions League exit at the hands of Paris Saint-Germain but Bellingham demolished their last stand.

Madrid showed the same grit to stay in the match as they did midweek against Manchester City on the way to the final four in Europe before Bellingham's knock-out blow left the Santiago Bernabeu crowd delighted.

Madrid's top scorer with 21 goals across all competitions, the former Borussia Dortmund man netted twice in Madrid's Clasico win over Barcelona in October and is shining in his first season in Spain at only 20 years old. —*AP*

PREMIER LEAGUE

Liverpool stays in the hunt for the title

- Liverpool stayed in the hunt for the Premier League title and moved level on points with leader Arsenal with a 3-1 victory over Fulham that was illuminated by a brilliant free kick by Trent Alexander-Arnold on Sunday.

LONDON, 22 APRIL

Liverpool stayed in the hunt for the Premier League title and moved level on points with leader Arsenal with a 3-1 victory over Fulham that was illuminated by a brilliant free kick by Trent Alexander-Arnold on Sunday.

Liverpool bounced back from Thursday's exit to Atalanta in the Europa League quarterfinals and last weekend's home loss to Crystal Palace by winning at Craven Cottage after Jurgen Klopp dropped Mohamed Salah and Alexis Mac Allister to the bench.

Alexander-Arnold's curling free-kick in the 32nd was canceled out by Timothy Castagne's first goal for Fulham in first-half stoppage time.

Ryan Gravenberch and Diogo Jota scored in the second half as Liverpool joined Arsenal on 74 points — one more than defending champion Manchester City, which has a game in hand.

Liverpool's Ryan Gravenberch celebrates scoring his team's second goal with teammate Luis Diaz PHOTO: AFP

Fulham academy graduate Harvey Elliott, who swapped London for Merseyside in 2019, was galvanized by jeers from the home fans as he helped his side create the first chance of the match.

The attacking midfield player instinctively picked out Alexander-Arnold, whose cross could not be directed in by Luis Diaz's glancing header as the ball narrowly missed the inside of the post.

Alexander-Arnold then showed off his elite ball-striking ability. First, he received the ball centrally and he delivered a first-time side-footed pass in behind Fulham fullback Antonee Robinson before Diaz's low cross to Jota was struck wide of the right-hand post.

Then, after Joao Palhinha brought down Jota on the counterattack, Alexander-Arnold stood over the setpiece in an almost central position near the edge of the area and whipped the ball over the wall into the top left-hand corner. —*AP*